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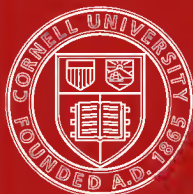
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# VANITY SQUARE

A STORY OF FIFTH  
AVENUE LIFE

BY

EDGAR SALTUS



PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON  
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**PART I**

**THE MAN WHO DID NOT EXIST**





# VANITY SQUARE

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## I.

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WHEN the last guest had gone, Uxhill, with a yawn of boredom unrelieved, dropped in a chair.

“Add six zeros and see what they come to. Add sixty. Add six hundred. The result is the same. They amount to nothing.”

He looked at the ceiling. It was charming. Cupids sprawled there, laughing idly at the carpet beneath. He looked at his wife. She, too, was charming. Although the mother of a big-little girl, she seemed a girl herself. He looked about the room. It was charming also, long and wide, fitted with things harmonious. They bored him.

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"Nothing," he repeated. Gloomily he considered his fingers. "Instead of pottering away in New York, we might be in Cairo, in Java, in Peru. But you won't go anywhere. Supposing we do happen to have a few pennies. Every one else has. They are the essentials of existence. But without something more, something to take you out of yourself, they have the value of zeros. String them out all you like. The sum total is nothing."

Maud Uxhill got from her seat. Her not going anywhere must have been an exaggeration. In any event it could not have included the dressmaker. Her frock, the color of fried smelt, was distinctly ruedelapaixian. She kissed the palm of her hand and waved it at him. Then down the room she sauntered.

Uxhill watched her. She had the face of a fay, the waist of a willis, hair of

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burnt orange, and vesuvian eyes. At a piano presently she was strumming something, a strain sweet and sad and slow, haunting and cloying, one that suggested a minuet of lovers who already are ceasing to love.

For a moment it detained his thoughts, then vaporizing them, it took him back years before to the torrid August day when from his yacht he had landed at the hot little village on the Massachusetts coast, met her, wooed her violently, and on that yacht of his, like a pirate, had carried her away.

The rapture of the midsummer highwayry lay in his memory, green as the ocean and relatively just as strong. It had, too, its proper and relieving touch of the grotesque, the consternation of a cleric further down the coast, noisily awakened at midnight to wed them,—a tall, pale, white old man, who, in the

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shadows of candles suddenly arranged, looked like a ghost with a stomach-ache, and whom Uxhill bundled through the service with a haste which he denounced as "positively, sir, indecent."

That, though, in view of his cloth and its indulgence, ultimately, no doubt, he forgave. To forgive is always easy. But it is particularly easy to forgive youth and beauty ardent and rash. Only ardent youth and rash beauty are not afterward invariably so forgiving to themselves. What is worse, occasionally there are others still more unrelenting.

Maud's father, a cleric himself, a bishop-to-boot, a Massachusetts bishop; Bishop Upjohn, whose people—when such people were—believed in witches and burned them, too, would have none of Uxhill. Uxhill's name, a trifle unusual, was at the start against him. Had it been Brown now, or Jones or Robin-

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son, or even all three, it may be that the bishop would not at the time have caught on, and if later he did get his bearings, why, then, in the interim, instead of the "I disown you" which he flung after his daughter, the girl would have had his blessing and, all things being possible, his prayers for the best.

But Uxhill had figured in press accounts of certain social and highly uncivil proceedings that now and then occur in the upper circles of New York life. In so figuring he had been represented as a man about town, which, without being quite sure of our Latinity, we may assume is a loose fish; he had been further represented as etcetera and so forth, which cover whatever you like, or, as it happened in this case, everything that the bishop particularly abhorred.

The bishop, sharp-sighted, was hard of hearing. Uxhill had been in the vil-

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lage four days and in and out of the bishop's house forty times before the latter got his name straight. When he did point blank he let fire. "Are you the man who and so forth etcetera?"

Uxhill admitted that he was the man, but denied that he was etcetera and so forth. As a matter of fact he was not. That, though, for the moment is a detail. It was not, however, a detail to the bishop. It was an aggravation. When he saw a statement in print he believed it. We are many of us quite like him. Believing what he had read and regarding the denial as on a par with the rest, "What, then, may I ask," he immediately and menacingly inquired, "is the object of your visit?"

"Your daughter," was Uxhill's unemollient reply.

The bishop, flaming and furious, showed him the door, a very pretty door,

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the prettiest in the village, one well worth being shown. But Uxhill did not stop to admire. Straight out, his head in the air, he marched. On the other side was Maud. It was then the highwayry occurred. Without a thing save the clothes on her back, and the "I disown you" flung after like a slipper, violently he carried her off and that night, the indignant cleric in the shadows and candles officiating, made her his own.

It was all like some predatory swoop of a Barbary bey, hallowed only by the brief mad wooing of the lovely girl who had loved Uxhill as suddenly and as insanely as he loved her.

As the strain, haunting and cloying, that told of lovers who are ceasing to love, drifted from the piano to him, it must have stirred a memory, awakened an echo. The recollection of the rapture returned. Time had not dulled it. He

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still loved the girl who had loved him. Better even than before. But,—for a but there is always.

Epictetus, who knew a good deal more than most of us, said that we should wish things to be as they are. The majority of us want things to be as they are not. There is the main source of common boredom, individual exasperation, and general progress. It is foolish, but it is human. Uxhill, who was a poet and consequently unfitted to balance himself on the tight-ropes of philosophy, rebelled at life, or, more exactly, at the life to which circumstances had condemned him. However censorious, we cannot blame him for that. The metropolitan existence of a man of means and no occupation is the most maddening that civilization has devised,—a form of earthly damnation in which you are forced to consort with people who have scandals and stocks for



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sole topics, and, what is worse, for sole joys. Uxhill abominated it. Like a bull in a stall with garlands on his horns, instead of blood, he felt that from the heath he had been banished. He complained of it. His complaining did not stop there. His sister, a lady who had married the last of the Gemine, and who lived with her prince abroad, jeered at him for a stick-in-the-mud. He knew, or, what amounts to the same thing, he thought he knew, that the jeer was deserved. The chef in his kitchen, the footman in the hall, the grooms and the horses in the stable, wearied him. He was tired of the whole lot. But what irked him most was his durance in the precinct in which he lived, and which, with Central Park on one side, Madison Avenue on the other, Seventy-second Street for frontier, and the Plaza for approach, is colloquially known as Vanity Square.

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And so it fell about that his house, together with the life that he led in it, bored him, and of that boredom he complained.

He complained, though, to indolent ears. Maud, innately epictetian, was satisfied with things as they were. Other lands, other scenes with adventures concomitant might be agreeable or the reverse, she had no wish for them. The easy, uneventful routine of her days contented her completely. She was happy in it, and that happiness radiated from her in the serenity of unalterable smiles.

You cannot fight very well with people who won't fight back. Against cheerfulness complaints are impotent. Conscious of which, Uxhill, homesick for the windy heath, for the bold, roving life of wild beasts, bellowed in his stall, but he bellowed at a ceiling on which cupids sprawled.

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The cupids paid no attention to him. Maud paid none either. At his initial fractiousness she had tried to argue. It was just what he wanted. It was no trouble to him whatever; on the contrary, it was a pleasure to prove to her that two and two make five, which perhaps after all they do. Discerning which, thereafter she kissed a hand at him and sauntered away.

Women are the very devil, he announced to the cupids on discovering how he was being led. But the announcement, though true, was not otherwise of any value. It did not alter a situation which, being wholly to Maud's liking, she omitted to disturb.

At first, before the big-little girl was born, they had gone out. To Uxhill it was the thing to do. But, when the child came, Maud let go. She had supped on society, she declared. By

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that time Uxhill, too, had had his fill. He had become quite domestic, and not as some men are, in the homes of other people, but in his own. He preferred it to any other, and so preferring, preferred also to have Maud to himself.

At this preference a woman less in love would have been annoyed, a woman more worldly would have been alarmed. Both would have known that men weary of all dishes, particularly of the best, especially when served at each meal. But that fact, however commonplace, Maud did not grasp. In her past experience there had been nothing to prepare her for it. The accessories and surroundings of her girlhood had been too Puritan for such epicureanism. To her father it would have been just so much Coptic. The girl's mother had long been dead; she was without sisters or brothers, and her friends, although

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Bostonians and therefore supposedly learned, were winsomely ignorant, as winsome girls should be, that one can have ever a surfeit of sweets. Then also, though the Puritan flower transplanted bloomed with fresh beauty in Vanity Square, and although the flower united in itself every sort of suave perfume, serenity, sympathy, sweetness, and strength, yet that odor, a trifle heady, which we call worldliness, this Massachusetts rose never exhaled. It was her great defect, one that directly precipitated the drama which these pages unfold.

Meanwhile, that preference of Uxhill neither annoyed nor alarmed. On the contrary. Of her many pleasures the chiefest was the fact that he had no other occupation than herself. In Wall Street he had a big box to which he went infrequently, and from which laboriously he

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cut coupons. That practically was his sole toil. In Rhode Island, where he was born and where his predecessors had accumulated a very large fortune, he and his sister had interests which, conveniently, were managed for them. Otherwise he had no business or pursuits. Maud liked that. She liked to feel that thus it would be always, into the remotest future, until they both were dead.

So it was that she loved a life which to a woman more worldly would have been unendurable. In its uniformity was its charm. In winter there was this house in the upper sixties. In summer there was a villa on the sea. Maud's ambition did not extend beyond the monotony of those dual homes. The crumpled roseleaf of her life had come when at the monotony he had rebelled and tried to persuade her that they would both be better off in some place other

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than where they were. But with the conservatism of a woman who really loves she shrank from fresh fields, from the distracting forms and faces there. Now and then she had people in to dine. Now and then she and Uxhill dined out. Apart from that nothing there was to disturb the closely guarded atmosphere that she loved save only the roseleaf, latterly crumpled afresh each day and each day smoothed anew.

When this drama begins she was smoothing it again with a slow, cloying air from which now at last little quivering bubbles of gayety emerged, and, as her fingers strayed from one strain into another, a woman with gimlet eyes, tall, angular, prim as a Puritan Sunday, appeared at the drawing-room door.

Maud, without staying the notes, beckoned her with an uplift of the chin.

"What is it, Nora?"

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The woman bent to her, whispering something. She had been her nurse, now she was nurse to her child.

Maud looked over at Uxhill, motioned Nora away, stood up, followed her. But presently she reappeared.

“Gerald,” she said in the low, sweet voice that was hers, “ring up Sayce. Mowgy is ill.”



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## II.

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**M**OWGY was in a little bright bed. She was six years old. Her hair, the color of ripe chestnuts, was abundant. Her eyes of porcelain blue, charged ordinarily with question-marks and mischief, now were troubled. Their long lashes drooped heavily.

The room, large, high-ceiled, gave to the south and west. Opposite the bed was a mantel on which roamed a herd of elephants in ivory, guarded by minute ivory men. Beneath was a doll-house that contained many things, infinitely precious, which Mowgy allowed no one but herself to touch. Nearby, in little chairs, a harem of dolls sat upright. They were all very dear, as a rule, very good, and, according as Mowgy regarded

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their behavior, so, in turn, were they rewarded by sharing her bed. But they must have all misbehaved that day. There were none of them with her.

That afternoon she had returned from the park listless, without appetite for bread and butter; symptoms of which Maud, who had been out, was ignorant. But not Nora. When Maud did return, she had to hurry. There were guests that evening. Later, the guests gone, the symptoms accentuating, the alarm was given. Then shortly Sayce came.

Sayce, general practitioner in Vanity Square, had a face in which there was not a line, a profusion of white hair, a skin of brick, and an air of such immateriality that you would have said a breath and he would blow away. He was a great friend of the Uxhills. He was a great friend of everybody. Without being a wizard, he understood himself;

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what was better, his patients. When the latter were little people he added to these advantages the further ability of understanding their parents. It takes a physician to do the one, a psychologist to do the other. Sayce boasted he was both. But the boast was always attenuated by the admission that he was not infallible. In the present instance he was uncertain. Methodically but swiftly he had examined the child.

"Perhaps but a cold," he announced to Uxhill and Maud, indicating as he did so the usual remedies, recommending the usual precautions, displaying the usual smile.

"Goodnight, Mowgy," he added.

But the child's thoughts were occupied with other things than civilities.

"When I grow up will I be sick and disagreeable and married?" she anxiously asked.

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“Not if you go to sleep and take now what Nora gives you.”

“And to-morrow may I play with my dollies?”

“To-morrow, if you lie very still and don’t talk, you may do anything you like,” Sayce, in his uncertainty, answered.

But diphtheria was very prevalent just then. The possibility of it he disclosed to the Uxhills.

“In which case,” he resumed, as they passed from the room, “I will get you Miss Sixmith, who knows quite as much as I do; in some things, more.”

“Sixmith!” Uxhill repeated. “Is she any connection of the Canadian scientist?”

“His daughter.”

“But—”

“I know. A man like that! How is it that his daughter is a trained nurse? Everybody asks the same thing. But he

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is dead, and he died bankrupt. Bacteriologists are not financiers."

"He left nothing, then?"

"Not even his title. For the British Government made a peer of this man—who had none, in his own particular line; that is, save perhaps Pasteur. But, as he had no male heir, the title lapsed. Though, by courtesy, his daughter is, of course, the Honorable Miss Sixmith. You would not suspect it, however. She is a plain-spoken girl, without airs or pretences. She knows her duties and attends to them."

"Ugliness and antiseptics undorned," said Uxhill. "I can see her and I can smell her from here. But perhaps—"

"Perhaps, as you say," Sayce interrupted, "you may be spared the infliction. I shall know better shortly. Did you hear about Besalul?"

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They had reached the hall below, where a footman was helping the physician with his coat.

Sayce, buttoning his gloves, continued :  
“The day before yesterday, Besalul came in with Madame from a drive. She went upstairs. He looked over an evening paper. The butler announced dinner. Besalul sent him after Madame. The butler could not find her. Nobody has been able to since. How? Why? You know as much as I do. Jones told me about it at dinner.”

“Yoda Jones?” Maud asked.

“Yes, he and I were dining together at the Athenæum Club.”

“When you see him next,” said Maud, “tell him that he neglects me shamefully.”

“I shall abuse him for it properly,” the physician answered.

Then he, too, vanished.

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"I know Besalul," Uxhill announced as he and Maud reëntered the drawing-room. "He is just so much buttered toast and he married some mush-and-milk from Cleveland."

"What a delightful union," Maud absently replied.

"The point is that the milk appears to have turned. I suppose it wanted a change. By the way, a change might do Mowgy good."

"Yes, dear, we will see what Sayce says to-morrow. But I must go to her. You stop here. I will be back in a little while."

Like the Besalul of the tale, Uxhill gathered up an evening paper. It bored him. He threw it down, entered the dining-room, a charming extension of the charming house; rummaged about, found a cigar and lit it.

The lighting occurred before a mirror

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that ran up from the floor between two wide windows. In it he looked at himself. What he saw was superiorly satisfactory. Without being good-looking, he was good to look at,—tall, bright, obviously high-strung. Even in the colorlessness of evening-dress he had an air of polished peremptoriness, the appearance of one accustomed to be immediately obeyed. That appearance, joined to his manner, which, when not earnest, was urbanely contemptuous, had, in the bad buccaneer days, effected plenty of execution.

But since the final highwayry, this corsair, who in earlier nights had written a sequence of sonnets that is quoted still, had become so tame that the bishop, had he known, might perhaps have forgiven. The elopement had been simply outrageous. Time, though, is a great emollient. But, Boston and New York are



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fully five hours apart. The bishop had little affection for trains and less for Vanity Square. Having disowned his daughter, he stuck to it, salving his conscience, if he had a conscience, by wondering occasionally whether she had repented. Before he found out, other and more momentous matters ensued.

Coming events, we are told, cast their shadows before. But it is wrong to believe everything we hear. Destiny has no messengers, or, if it have, it does not use them. It is too cruel for that or too kind. As Uxhill turned from the mirror he was as ignorant as the bishop of what the morrow held. He knew only that the day was tedious. The substance of it was expressed in the six zeros at which he had flouted. Their nothingness irked. With the imagination from which the sonnets had resulted, he compared himself to a *pot-au-feu* with wings. At the

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epoch when the verses were shaping themselves he had sailed the Ægean, skirted Paphos, visited Cytherea, loitered among the lovely shrines. Latterly they had been claiming him and this not because, to put it delicately, he was contemplating any migratory system of domestic experiences, but simply and solely because he was bored. We always want what we lack. The hour was not remote when he was to look back on the tranquillity which induced the boredom as life's full delight.

Even then it was departing. That night Mowgy grew worse. Shortly thereafter the suspicion of Sayce was confirmed. Toxæmia appeared, diphtheria with it; Miss Sixmith as well.

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### III.

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**I**T is the opinion of moralists that when a girl has succeeded in being good-looking she has fulfilled every duty in life. This opinion was one which the Honorable Miss Sixmith made it very obvious that she did not share. When Uxhill first saw her he was conscious of a new conception of beauty. His trained eye followed her. But to such things she was used.

The fact that her appearance was uncommon, even as a child, strangers turning after her on the street had made her aware. It had made her aware, too, of the pleasure of long meditations before the looking-glass that showed back the perfect profile of her perfect face. In these meditations she got at times so

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close to the glass that the vapor of her breath, obscuring it, hid her from herself. She rubbed it off and looked again.

The pleasure was too puerile to endure. But admiration, always ambient and sometimes audible, she trailed as a torch trails smoke. It gratified her greatly until, as she matured, it provoked advances,—attempts at acquaintance so odious that when she went out unaccompanied she went veiled, forced to hide her beauty as though instead of a glory it were a shame.

These things she confided to Maud, not at once but much later, when Mowgy was convalescent and the community of the sick-room had made the two women friends. During the progress of the disease, up to and over its crisis, she had thought for nothing but the child, tending her with a solicitude which Maud herself could not have exceeded; with a compe-

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tence which Sayce had not forecast ; tending her wearilessly, sleeping, when she had to sleep, like a dog on guard, with one eye open ; it may be with both.

The attack, brief but vicious, finally was repulsed. Such danger as there had been retreated, leaving Mowgy like a little battlefield, devastated but secure. Yet the honors of victory, titularly Sayce's, all, except Nora—unmollifiably jealous and therefore profoundly distrustful—accorded to this girl, who had behaved like a hero and who looked like a saint.

It was then only that she found time to tell Maud a little concerning herself, among other things that her name was Stella.

“It suits you,” said Maud. “It describes you. Besides there is music in it. In choosing a name for a girl parents should think of the lover who will one day pronounce it.”

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“I hardly fancy that my parents gave much thought to that, and it would not have mattered much if they had.”

The girl’s voice was bell-like in clarity. As she spoke she looked about the room. It was Maud’s room, a very charming room, fitted with delightful things, among which was a silver bed. It seemed to please her.

But Maud, with that interest which all women take in the interests of other women, particularly when they are beautiful, persisted.

“Surely you will meet, if indeed you have not already met, some one who—”

Miss Sixmith smiled, displaying glimpses of teeth small, firm, white as white paper.

“It is the calling of most girls to meet that some one, to marry and bear children. Were it otherwise, life would cease. But I have a different vocation.

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Without being presumptuous, I hope, if I may, to continue my father's work."

"That will be very fine. No doubt you will succeed. But I think that love alone brings happiness."

Again there was a glimpse of those teeth. "My father used to say that happiness was not meant for us, that we are souls in the guise of animals, and therefore unfitted for it."

Of this conception of things Maud would have none. Like a fly she brushed it away. "I am happy. You have helped to make me so. The way you pulled Mowgy out is a thing which Uxhill and I can never repay."

"I did but my duty," the girl, rising as she spoke, replied.

Though not tall, she seemed so. Though nobody, she impressed. The regulation costume which she wore was not unbecoming, but it jarred. In it she

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suggested the passionless abbess of some passionless priory dressed for a masquerade. The quality of her beauty, perfectly and coldly austere, as true beauty ever is, was humanized, however, by her eyes, luminously blue, and by her smile, which, when she wished, was one of rare seduction.

“Don’t go,” Maud pleaded. “I love to look at you. Your face is so unusual.”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“Unfortunately! How can you say so? Do sit again and tell me.”

It was then the confidences were made. At their conclusion Maud had a remedy.

“While you are with us I will go out with you, and Uxhill shall follow with a stick. By the way, he has been complaining. He says that since you have been here he has seen you but twice. I consoled him by saying that you were to



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dine with us to-night. I shall send Adelaide to you to help you dress."

Adelaide was the maid, and presumably a very good one. But the girl would have none of her.

"Thank you, I have got on too long alone to need assistance now. Besides, my one evening-dress is easy enough to fasten."

"And very becoming, too, I am sure."

Maud was right. Though a black dress it was becoming. But everything became her. In it, with her lithe arms and bare neck, she needed but a shower of diamonds to have suggested the ideal *Astrafiamente*, who, as you may remember, was *Queen of Night*. Yet that, of course, was because of the wearer. A plain girl in a gown so plain would have seemed even plainer. The simple severity of it set Stella off. When she entered the drawing-room, Uxhill, who

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had fed on entrancing apparitions, blinked.

“To look at you, Miss Sixmith, one should have smoked-glasses.”

Stella utterly ignored the remark. It was perhaps a trifle *fade*. She turned to Maud. But at once a diversion was supplied. Dinner was announced. At a glance the girl already had taken in the things, costly and futile, with which the drawing-room was filled. Before she was seated in the dining-room, everything there, the lustres, the gold and silver service, the tulipwood sideboard, the perfectly appointed table, the butler in hierarchic black, the undermen in livery, everything was as quickly absorbed.

“We have been having such a learned talk,” Maud, in her low, sweet voice, announced. “Miss Sixmith says we are souls in disguise.”

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In Uxhill's glass a servant was pouring red Hungarian champagne.

"That is rather an optimistic view, don't you think?"

Stella's glass which the man was attempting to fill she covered with her hand.

"I meant to say souls in the guise of animals. It seems to me that the majority of people get through life very much as brutes do,—in a sort of torpid sleep. They do not appear to know where they are going,—or to care. All they require is to be comfortable. That is so degrading. Besides, they are very tedious, particularly in conversation."

Uxhill laughed. "They are, indeed. Especially in Vanity Square. A lot of damned nobodies, talking about nothing. That is my opinion of them."

"Not damned," Stella corrected, "but ignored. God, I am sure, does not know

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that they exist. To God they have the significance that ants have for us. What ants do we do not know, we do not care. In relation to the Infinite, humanity is just as obscure. God surely is unaware of our existence. Otherwise there would be no pain, no poverty. He would not let sorrow and suffering be."

Uxhill leaned forward. "Without being indiscreet, Miss Sixmith, was that your father's idea?"

"My father used to say that it is very unimportant what we do; that what alone imports is what we become. He used also to assign as a reason for our inability to see things as they are to the fact,—but forgive me, *j'abuse*."

"But we are immensely interested!" Uxhill exclaimed. "What is the reason?"

"That we are asleep in a prison."

To that, though, Maud objected.

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“A very agreeable prison, then. Personally I would not exchange it for a palace.”

Uxhill laughed again. “Yes, there is the devil of it. Maud has not yet awaked. I have. I don’t mean by that that as yet I am suited for the life eternal, but I do feel that I am not suited for the infernal existence which one leads in New York, where you are baked in summer, frozen in winter, and bored to death all the year round.”

To this Miss Sixmith assented. “It is certainly very tiresome not to have anything to do.”

“Yes,” said Uxhill, “it is as bad as trying to be comfortable.”

A servant was approaching with a tray.

“What is that?” he asked.

“A letter, sir.”

“I never read letters. Give it to Mrs. Uxhill.”

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"It is for me as it is," said Maud, when the note reached her. "Do you mind?" she continued to Stella. Then, after reading it, she added, "It's from Grace Amsterdam. She wants us to dine on Wednesday."

"The day after to-morrow! Somebody has backed out. Tell her we can't."

"Patmore," Maud asked of the butler, "is anyone waiting?"

"Yes, mem."

Maud stood up. "I shall have to send her a line." She turned to Stella. "You will forgive me, won't you?"

A swish of silk. She had gone.

Again Uxhill leaned toward the girl.

"Maud has lost her heart to you. So have I. I have been urging her to go abroad. If she consents, will you join us?"

Stella, with her starlike eyes, looked at

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him, at his empty glass, then across the room. It was her answer, or, rather, her rebuke, one which a girl more *mondaine* might have omitted.

But Uxhill, with his polished peremptoriness, persisted. Once more she looked at him and once more away. Before progress were possible,—if possible it were,—Maud reappeared.

“I told Grace that we have people to dine. That’s you,” she added to Stella. “Now tell me do you care for music?”

“I know I ought to. But I don’t. Not in the least.”

Uxhill threw his head back.

“Then one thing is certain, you have never loved.”

“And I never shall,” the girl distantly replied.

“It is such a pity, too,” said Maud. “Why,” she exclaimed with a prettily affected indignation, “you are just the

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kind of a girl a man would feel like cutting his throat for."

"Yes," said Uxhill, looking as he spoke into those starlike eyes, "and when a man does not feel that way, he has no feeling at all."

Further platitudes followed. Courses succeeded each other. Sweets came and went. Finally, under pretext of leaving Uxhill to smoke, Maud took Stella away.

But though in the dining-room they left one man, in the drawing-room they found another.



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#### IV.

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THE dining-room was in an extension, because of which, because, too, of intervening portières, those who happened to be there could not hear anything that might be occurring elsewhere in the house. It was for this reason that, on preparing to vacate it, Maud and Stella were unaware that on leaving one man they were to meet another.

But others knew. As they entered the drawing-room a voice announced,—

“Mr. Jones.”

Whereat, inaudibly, with the silent tread that felines and acrobats, who have good shoemakers, share, there entered one who had gray, determined eyes, an unmoustached, determined mouth, a face

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of bull-dog tenacity, and a bandbox air. The fastidiousness of his evening-clothes, a fastidiousness recognizable, however, only in the mere modelling of them, yet, nonetheless, denoting prolonged meditations, contrasted curiously with the strength that he exhibited and the vigor that he exhaled.

In the bad buccancer days he had been a pal of Uxhill's. Since the transplanting of the Massachusettian rose he had become her servant, spreading always and openly before her feet the mantle of his admiration. Professionally he was a lawyer, in training for the Bench. Personally he was an athlete never out of trim.

"Yoda," said that rose, in her low, sweet voice, giving him a hand, the wrist of which he raised and over which he bent.

She turned to Stella, introducing him. Then at some memory she laughed.

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"Make her your best bow, do,—the one I like."

"It might alarm Miss Sixsmith," he answered, and looked at the girl. But her appearance reassured him.

Backward to the further end of the room he ran, ran forward, touched the carpet lightly with his hands and as lightly tossed a somersault, landing a few steps from Stella, easily without apparent effort, his bandbox air unmarred.

Stella gave him the rare seduction of her smile. From beyond came applause. Uxhill, emerging from the dining-room, was clapping his hands. Advancing, he rested familiarly an arm on the acrobat's shoulder.

"Here," he said to Stella, "here is the unusual. Brains and brawn combined. The women are all crazy about him,—beginning with Maud. It will be your turn next."

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"No, Gerald," Maud interrupted; "it is your turn now. We are having a little vaudeville and you come next."

"Yes," said Jones, "with one of your sonnets."

"The one on history," Maud suggested.

Amiably Uxhill assented. "Very good, but I'll skip the octave. It only beats about the bush. Here is the tail of it:

" ' And as there to me from its pages streams  
The incoherent story of the years,  
The aimlessness of what men undertake,  
I think our lives are surely but the dreams  
Of spirits, dwelling in the distant spheres,  
Who, as we die, do one by one awake.' "

Jones applauded. Stella, too. Uxhill turned to the girl.

"A little in line with what we were talking about, don't you think? That is what interested me. I used to believe in reincarnation; do you?"

## VANITY SQUARE

"It is difficult not to. It explains everything. That is its great defect. Yet, in the infinite, there is room for so much, for so many combinations, that no doubt, ultimately, when the world has dissolved and reformed, sooner or later we shall all find ourselves here again precisely as we are."

"Jones throwing somersaults and I spouting sonnets? That is a very gloomy prospect."

Jones lifted a finger. "If Miss Sixmith will permit me, I will venture to disagree with her. Precisely as we are descended from gorillas, so from us will gods be born. Mythology is merely a story of what might have been, and that which might have been will yet be. Evolution may be slow, but it is sure. It seems in us to have accomplished its final achievement. That is because we have such flattering notions of ourselves. But

## VANITY SQUARE

if we could only wait long enough, beings as superior to us as we are to the primal anthropoid would put us in a back seat. Whose turn is it next?"

"Mine," said Maud.

She moved to the piano, where Jones followed. As she played, he talked, Stella and Uxhill meanwhile forming a separate conversational group of their own, which at last Jones disrupted. He was going.

Then presently Stella, too, disappeared.

A little later as Uxhill sat in Maud's room, in which Adelaide with gold-backed brushes was brushing his wife's burnt-orange hair, she said to him:

"Wouldn't it be dear if they were to fall in love? It is high time Yoda married, and she would be just the girl."

This program had not occurred to Uxhill before. Now that it was presented he dismissed it.

## VANITY SQUARE

“Nonsense!” he exclaimed.

“But, Gerald, I don’t see why you say that.”

Nor did he.

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V.

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“DON’T you think,” said Maud the next day, “that if any one were to take her up and bring her out she would be a success?”

The she, of course, was Stella. It was to Uxhill that Maud was speaking. They were at luncheon, a go-as-you-please repast, served in this house in the White Cat fashion, invisibly, by servants who had brought the food and gone.

“Success is a big word,” Uxhill replied. “But a girl with a soul above scandal, and what is more above chiffons, would certainly surprise.”

“I was thinking of her looks.”

“Yes, no doubt. They are surprising also. An old chemist decomposed society into beautiful women and intellectual



## VANITY SQUARE

men. But old chemists don't go out much. The essential ingredient of a society woman is charm. This girl lacks the *désir de plaire*. Her intellect is obvious. But intellect in a woman is like beauty in a man. It is incongruous. No," Uxhill, after a momentary interlude with knife and fork, resumed, "she would not make a hit in society. The men would be scared by her brains and the women by her looks. She is too disquieting for either. Where is she?"

"Reading to Mowgy. She said she would join us shortly. Mowgy adores her. That is such a test. A child's instinct is unerring."

At this, Uxhill, occupied with a *mousse* of ham, shook his head. He was not so sure. The worst men may have the best dogs. The instincts of the latter are also unerring. Having finished the *mousse*,

## VANITY SQUARE

he was about to say as much. But abruptly the girl entered.

Uxhill jumped up, drew a chair and shoved it a bit as the girl seated herself.

“ ‘Blossom of branches !’ he exclaimed.

“ ‘Blossom of branches and words  
That bring tears swiftest and the long notes of birds,  
Violently singing till the whole world sings ;  
I, Sappho, shall be one with all these things,  
With all high things forever.’ ”

“ There,” he resumed, “ that is what you remind me of. It has puzzled me since I saw you first. You suggested somebody or something, though what I could not tell. But as you entered I knew. You bring with you gusts of song that blew through Mitylene.”

Stella looked at Maud. The latter was laughing. Over the girl’s Madonna face there crept a thin, chill smile.

“ Because of a little man, Sappho, I believe, was foolish enough to drown her-

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self. I am quite sure no man, little or big, could make me as foolish as that."

"Or foolish at all," Uxhill interjected. "The quotation in that respect is not very appropriate, but—"

"Appropriate!" Maud interrupted. "It is not even right. You haven't got it straight. It begins, 'Blossom of branches and on each high hill.' I remember well enough. You used to quote it at me."

But her laughter had oddly subsided.

With superior tact Stella intervened. "I see they have dug up some of the lady's verses somewhere. But, then, nowadays we either dig up or pull down. We do not build. Scientifically the world has advanced, but otherwise we are no wiser than the Greeks. We represent a very curious case of arrested development."

Stella had before her an egg cooked in

## VANITY SQUARE

a potato. It was to the potato her remarks were addressed.

"You say 'we,'" Uxhill rejoined. "The plural is singular. There has been no arrest in your development. And there is just the oddity of it, for you look as though you had stepped from the Golden Legend, and talk as though you came from Mars."

"Why Mars?" the girl negligently inquired.

"I would have said Venus, but it seemed less subtle."

"You mean more stupid," Maud from across the table threw at him. "Stella, don't pay any attention to him. That is the way he talks to Mowgy. He puts you on her level."

"Mowgy's level is a very high one," the girl replied. "I read to her a story of a very terrible person who devoured toys and children, and who for his crimes

## VANITY SQUARE

was changed into a candlestick. She told me it was amusing but improbable."

"Ah," said Uxhill, "there are no children any more."

"Not at this table at any rate," said Maud. "Not at this end of it, I mean. Come, Stella, let us leave him. This afternoon I want to take you to Mrs. Amsterdam's."

"That is very kind of you ; but may I ask why ?"

"In order that you may enjoy the spectacle of the richest woman in the world."

"Will Mr. Amsterdam also be on view ?"

"Dear me, no," Uxhill explained. "Years ago an unpleasant story came out about him and he died, his friends said, of exposure."

"What a sensitive person!" said Stella, getting from her seat.

As she did so she raised a hand and

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adjusted her hair, or, perhaps, a comb that was in it. But one hand must have been insufficient. She raised the other, and with both arms uplifted, her fingers on the back of her head, followed Maud from the room.

Uxhill watched her go. When she had gone, he still saw her, saw, too, something that he had not seen before: the reason of love expressed by a woman merely in raising her arms.

In that movement of hers, unpremeditated and natural, made without thought of him, one which she could not have known that he had noticed, was an incitement generating the insanity of the desire to crush his lips against the ice of hers and taste the perfume of their frozen flower. No shape of sweet could be acuter than its savor. And at the chimera of it the room turned round.

In the heart of every one there is evil.

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Were it otherwise, in all creation the heart would be unique. In one sense, however, the heart is unique. There, influences that we know nothing of, impulses which some of us never feel, watch and wait. Usually, through one factor or another they are controlled, sometimes forgotten, more often ignored, but never banished. They are there. It is the distinguishing trait of a gentleman that he never betrays their presence.

Uxhill was a gentleman. He was also a human being. He could not rid himself of instincts inherited from primitive ancestors to whom woman was a prey. Yet, though he could not do that, he could prevent their expression.

In a moment the room ceased to revolve. Then, in irritation at himself, he gnawed at his moustache, and, after the manner of man, took a stroll on the uplands of self-communion.

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"I seem to be entertaining what I think I have seen described as a guilty passion." In the sotto voce of thought he added, "At my age, too!"

For the solace of smoke he sought a cigar. The cabinet in which the cigars were kept stood in front of a mirror into which not long before he had looked. He looked again. He saw a man with whose appearance he was perfectly familiar,—tall, bright, dressed with that extreme distinction which certain New Yorkers occasionally attain; thirty-five years old, a touch of gray over the ears, a touch which he had been told—and believed—accentuated his natural distinction, and at which he now looked with eyes that he could render insolent or tender, and which in his corsair days women had admired very much.

No; he was not Methuselah yet.

He found a cigar, lighted it, dropped



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back in his seat, and contemplated his beautifully varnished shoes.

"A girl like that!" he told them. "Why, there ought to be a law against it. A piece of diabolic incandescence left to roam about unchecked! It is not safe. If I had met her earlier I would have eaten her. But now she is not eatable. She is not even to be nibbled at. A mere peck and if eyes could kill, hers would. I can see them at it. What is worse yet, I can see Maud's."

At the beautifully varnished shoes he bowed. "*Non, Monsieur, soyons sage et brisons là.*"

Uxhill stood up, balanced himself on his heels, sauntered out into the hall, had himself helped into a coat, had his gloves handed to him, his hat, finally his stick, had doors opened for him, doors that were not closed until he had reached the

## VANITY SQUARE

street and wandered on, quickening his steps for a six-mile spin.

But it was brutally cold. He thought five might do, compromised on three, after which he entered the Athenæum Club, where any afternoon he could lose at bridge as much as he liked.

On this afternoon, instead of losing, he won. Miracles make us superstitious. He told himself that luck at cards means ill luck in love. He was just as well pleased. The post-luncheon commotion had gone. The desire for so much as a peck had gone with it. In its place was a rightful yet illogical irritation. At the unwitting girl he was vexed. But in some way the conscience must be salved.

Uxhill, having salved his own, had himself helped again to his things, helped into a cab and sent home. There he looked in on Mowgy, admired the things,

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very precious, which she allowed no one but herself to touch, and improvised for her a few extraordinary tales. When she had her fill of stories and bread and butter, he dressed, went to the drawing-room, and examined the evening papers. But he was getting hungry. He looked at a clock. In looking, he saw Stella. She was entering the room.

Instantly the vexation returned. On the spur of the moment, with some unformed idea of having it out with her, he got up, went to her, peered into her eyes, and in a voice that was hardly above a whisper, said very swiftly, "At luncheon I could have said to you, kiss me and kill me, but kiss me first. Since then—"

With the air of a divinity offended at being but looked at, the girl interrupted him. "Once and for all, I forbid you to address me as you have."

Suddenly Maud appeared. Had Ux-

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hill and the girl been exchanging vows they could not have separated more awkwardly.

With heightening wonder Maud looked at them. But Uxhill made a remark. Stella another. Conversation became general. Though general, it was dull. At dinner, which shortly ensued, it was duller.

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## VI.

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THE dulness was due perhaps to Maud. She was not quite up to the mark. That afternoon she had provided Stella with the spectacle of the richest woman in the world presiding richly in her own rich house. But any success which Maud may have anticipated for Stella the girl failed to score. From a case of gems you get a glare in which the brilliance of the brightest is diffused. To appreciate that brilliance the stone must be detached. In the radiant rooms there was a lavishness of radiant women in which the girl was lost. Her beauty was of a quality that required, like a jewel, relief.

By Mrs. Amsterdam she was greeted most amicably and instantly forgot.

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Onward from her with Maud she passed. In passing a man joined them, stopped them ; the group was reinforced. An American peeress, who, on a honeymoon trip with her earl to Canada, had met Stella at the governor-general's, recalled to her that pleasurable fact. When Stella turned from her to Maud the latter had disappeared. But the man remained. He had a pink skin, a fair, curled moustache and the endearing manner of an affectionate little dog.

"You must help me find Mrs. Uxhill," Stella told him. She had not caught his name, but she fancied it might be Fido.

"I but live your behests to obey," he promptly and ingratiatingly replied. "We will circumvent her at one of the buffets."

Gambolling at her side, he accompanied her through crowded suites. But the buffets were not reached, or at least not

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then. Down on them bore a large rapacious woman, wonderfully befurred. Stella could see her teeth, long, wide and even. Then what happened to the little man; whether he was but purloined or gobbled whole, she never knew. A faint yelp and he had vanished. But now, beyond was Maud, talking very earnestly to a man whom Stella recognized as Jones. Presently, after a little effort, she got to where they stood. Then Jones sank back. A sea of millinery had engulfed him.

The hall, though, was neighborly, and through it shortly, through an odor of flowers, of food, of finery, into which notes from an orchestra fell, the two women got away; or, rather, tried to. It was a minute or so before the Uxhill groom was discernible, and a minute or so more elapsed before he got to the brougham and got it back to where they

## VANITY SQUARE

were. After the conservatory atmosphere from which they had come the bite of the air was polar. Maud may have caught cold. In any event, at dinner she complained of not feeling quite well. Afterward, at Uxhill's suggestion, Stella got and gave her a simple preparation of quinine.

The preparation, though, failed to work wonders. The next day Maud was languid, slightly depressed, occasionally chill.

But Sayce was very neighborly. Summoned, he came, and a diagnosis was pronounced.

"A touch of coryza,—in short, nothing whatever. All the same," he added, "I am glad Miss Sixmith is still here."

At the time, Uxhill, the physician, and the girl were in Maud's room, where the latter lay in a big silver bed which Uxhill had found in Bengal.



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"I had intended to go this afternoon," Stella rejoined.

"That would be barbarous," said Uxhill; "we shan't let you."

"No, you had best remain," Sayce authoritatively ordered; "at least, until Mrs. Uxhill is up."

Maud said nothing. Her eyes were closed. It may be that she had not heard.

"Very good," Stella docilely answered.

As always, she was simply dressed; on this occasion in gray. Its sombreness did not detract from her beauty. Nothing could. But with her dense black hair, her starlike eyes, the scarlet of her mouth, the pallor of her face, her perfect features, her slender form that pulsated with health and youth,—with these attributes she looked in a sick-room a bit out of place.

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Of that she may have been conscious. After Sayce had given his directions and he and Uxhill had gone, she, too, left the room. When she returned her appearance was chastened. She had put on again the regulation garb.

She looked at Maud. "I have sent to the chemist's. The medicine will be here shortly."

But Maud did not seem to care.

"Perhaps," the girl resumed, "I had better see. It may have come."

Again she left the room. When she returned she brought a little package.

"Here it is. Mr. Uxhill had it. He was fetching it himself."

Stella undid the package. In it was a little bottle. From the bottle she poured some of the contents into a spoon which she gave to Maud. Then, putting the bottle down, she seated herself.

## VANITY SQUARE

“How is Mowgy?” Maud asked.

“Very well.”

“I think I will have her come here.”

“Dr. Sayce said he preferred you did not. Coryza is infectious.”

For a while there was silence. From the back of the silver bed hung a button.

Maud pressed it.

Adelaide knocked and entered.

“Tell Nora I want her.”

A moment or two and the nurse appeared.

“Nora, I—”

The sentence was never completed. Maud’s eyes closed. Her head fell back. She had fainted.

Through the joint efforts of the two nurses soon she recovered. But recovery from a swoon is a sensation peculiarly disagreeable. In your ears is the roar of returning life. Yet, in it you cannot tell who you are or where

## VANITY SQUARE

you are. You are conscious only that you are agonizing in some place undefined. Then up you swim.

Maud had never fainted before.

The sensation was new to her, so bewildering even that she did not know quite what had occurred, and it was absolutely with anger that Nora told her. But no one likes to be superseded. The old nurse was jealous.

Maud did not faint again that day. But though gradually thereafter the coryza departed, the languor remained.

A few days later Sayce diagnosed again and prescribed anew.

"You are a bit anæmic," he told her. "We will soon cure that. A tonic is what you need."

On his way out he got alone with Uxhill. "What has she on her mind?" he asked.

"On her mind!" repeated Uxhill.

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“Nothing. Nothing that I know of. Why?”

It is never judicious to put a flea in anyone's ear. In a harum-scarum place like New York it is not only injudicious, it is stupid. Besides, if a man does not know what his wife has on her mind, it is obviously not her wish that he should. Then, too, there are mysteries that are better ignored than elucidated.

“Oh!” Sayce exclaimed. “She gave me the impression of being a bit absent. But that may have been due to her anæmic condition.”

“No doubt. But I can't understand why she should be anæmic. Always her health has been perfect. Not since Mowgy was born has there been a thing the matter with her.”

“Precisely. She has overdone it. Metropolitan life would do up a football team.”

## VANITY SQUARE

"Bah! We go nowhere. We just sit about and twirl our thumbs."

"It may be due to that, then. What your wife needs is a change."

"A change!" cried the exasperated Uxhill. "A change! For a year and a day I have done nothing but beg her to go with me anywhere, anywhere at all,—to the pampas, to the sierras, to Tahiti, to Borneo. She has only to choose. But, no. She prefers this sordid city."

Sayce passed a hand over his eyes. Grand almoner of Vanity Square, he was viewing things, or thought he was, which he thought, too, Uxhill could not.

"Well," he concluded, "it is never wise to urge a lady against her will. It may be that your very persistence has told on her. Anyway, don't let her have any bothers."

## VANITY SQUARE

Getting into his coat, he added, "I will look in again shortly."

He was as good as his word. But he did not find that Maud had improved. When he again left her he was perplexed. Her condition presented symptoms which, though obscure in themselves, did not coincide with his original diagnosis.

Of that, however, he said nothing to Uxhill, who that morning seemed very busy.

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## VII.

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UXHILL was even busier than he seemed. He had a great job on his hands, the bother of going to Wall Street, getting into a cage, cutting off coupons, putting them into envelopes, entering them on a slip, adding up how much they came to, handing them to a man in another cage; with, meanwhile, the bother of getting the big bondbox out of the vault and back again.

It was a job that he loathed, and which always he put off as long as possible, depositing to the teller's never-failing surprise bundles of coupons, six, twelve, and sometimes eighteen months after the date on which they were payable, and then only because of the receipt of some polite warning of possible deficit.



## VANITY SQUARE

An intimation of this kind had reached him the evening before. Already he had spoken to Maud about it. On previous occasions when he had done so there had always been some little jest between them regarding it, he maintaining that he had to work like a drayman, and she admitting that it was dreadful. But on this occasion there was no jesting, nor was there any when, after Sayce had gone, he looked in on her again.

She was lying propped up in the silver bed. Beyond at a window Stella was seated. Together they formed a little group which, ordinarily, would have been charming. When a woman is exquisite, the white of pillows and the sheen of silks make her look like a flower in a garden, a rose chimerically fair. When she is beautiful, any severity of costume will, through sheer contrast, make her

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more beautiful still. Here were two women, differently, yet equally fetching ; one that, despite her beauty, seemed all mind, and one who, because of her charm, seemed all heart.

That heart, though, must have been aching. As Uxhill entered, Maud turned to him. Her eyes were full of tears. She raised a handkerchief and held it to them. But if the swoon she had had was new to her, her tears were new to him. In that face of hers, that was made for smiles and kisses, never had he seen them there before.

From Maud, he turned to Stella. With an air of slight displeasure, the girl raised her perfect brow and, much as though Maud were a wilful child, told him that she would not take her medicine.

“Well,” said Uxhill with affected lightness, “I can’t blame her for that. I keep in trim for no other reason than that I

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shan't have to take any of the stuff myself. But where is it?"

Stella stood up, indicating a bottle as she did so.

"Come, Maud," said Uxhill, as with it he approached the bed. "I might have known that I would have to give it to you. Come!"

Maud still held a hand to her eyes. But at this she let it fall, and from the pillows looked at him. Her eyes wet, circled and drawn, had in them the expression sad and tender of a beaten dog. There was pain in them, and with it something else which Uxhill, occupied with the medicine, did not see.

"Will you take it?"

"If you wish me to."

But a little of it spilled. She put the handkerchief to her mouth and turned away.

"I have to go to Wall Street," Uxhill

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continued. He did not specify for what; already he had told her. "It will be four before I can get back."

. Maud said nothing. Her head was still turned.

"It is the devil's own job," he added and hesitated, expecting the usual reply.

Maud, though, could not have been in the mood for it. She still said nothing.

"But when I do get back," Uxhill resumed, "I want to hear very good accounts of you, very good, indeed,—that you have taken your medicine and done what you have been told. We want to get you up, little girl. Don't we, Miss Sixmith?"

"I am sure we do," the girl in her bell-like voice replied. "I am sure, too, that when you return I shall have a good report of her for you."

Along the silk covering of the bed Maud's hand lay. Uxhill took it, pressed

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it, felt it press his own; then turning, he left the room.

What then occurred there it was some time before he could discover. For when the devil's own job of which he had spoken was over and he got back, it was by no means the same room as before.

The silver bed was there, but it was empty. The chair on which Stella had sat was empty, too. Things, also, had gone. Gold-backed brushes, for instance, usually very obvious on the dressing-table, had disappeared; other things, the absence of which he did not notice at the time, had disappeared as well. It was only the emptiness of the silver bed that he saw, and concluding that Maud must be in Mowgy's room, he went there.

The little bright crib, the elephants and guards across the way, the house filled with precious things beneath, the

## VANITY SQUARE

seraglio of dolls,—all these were unchanged. But Maud was not among them, nor was Mowgy.

They were somewhere else, he told himself. Perhaps in his rooms, or in the library, or in the drawing-room below. Anyway, they were somewhere.

In search of them, he left the nursery. In the hall, vacating a room beyond, Stella appeared. She had a hat on, a coat of black fur, and she was gloved.

“Where are they?” he asked.

At sight of him the girl stopped, and in a frightened way looked at him as people look, or are reported to look, at ghosts. With the fingers of her gloved hand, she made a little backward gesture.

“Don’t you know?” she inquired.

“Why, no; how should I? I’ve just got in.”

At this the girl, resting a steadying

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hand on the banister, answered dumbly, "Then I don't."

"Don't know where they are?" Uxhill repeated.

Stella shook her head. "No," she said dumbly. "I don't."

"But they must be somewhere, you know."

At that Stella nodded, yet so uncertainly, and with a lack of confidence so apparent, that for the first time Uxhill noticed the singularity of her attitude. It was as though something were affecting her, and that something,—fright.

Perplexedly he gnawed at his moustache. "But—"

Stella interrupted him. "A little after you went out they told me luncheon was served, and I went to the dining-room. Then one of the men told me that there had been an accident. It was quite a while before they brought anything.

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Afterward, when I came up here, there was no one."

At the brief climax of the simple tale, Uxhill stared. He did not at all understand. That something unusual had occurred was clear. Yet, however unusual the occurrence might be, he felt that it was but some mystification, which presently would be explained.

"They're in my rooms, then!" he declared.

"But they're gone!"

"Gone!" Uxhill cried. "Gone where?"

"That's it. I thought you knew."

"But I don't know. I don't even know why you say they are gone. Where is there for them to go to? Why do you say they are not here?"

"Adelaide told me. She helped them; she and one of the footmen. Nora packed while Adelaide helped your wife to dress, and the footman carried down



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the bags and boxes to a cab. Then Mrs. Uxhill took Mowgy and, with Nora, drove away. It was all done while I was in the dining-room. You can't hear in there, you know, what is going on anywhere else."

Uxhill leaned against the wall. In the palms of his hands and about his ears perspiration had started. He was in the thick of something, yet what?

"She is crazy," he announced at last, "or I am." But immediately he rallied. "She must have left some word. Will you come with me to the drawing-room? Though, first, I will see if there is no note here. In a moment I will join you below."

Down the stair slowly Stella went, while fruitlessly Uxhill rummaged, first in Maud's room, then in his own. But there was no note, not a line, nothing save the muteness of the deserted rooms, their dumb disorder, the silent tokens of

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a hurried flight, drawers emptied and unclosed, a dress of Maud's crumpled in a corner, a shoe of Mowgy's discarded or forgot.

Save that, save, too, his own consternation, there was nothing. But there are times when nothing is so much that the weight of it becomes unbearable.

In search of something that might serve to remove it, Uxhill got to the floor below, got the servants in the drawing-room, and got from them what they knew. That, though, was not a great deal, little more than what Stella had already told, except that the delay in serving luncheon had been caused by Nora, who, in Mrs. Uxhill's name, had bundled them all about; sending one footman to the Grand Central for a cab with a gallery, another to the apothecary; upsetting, meanwhile, a tray which the kitchen-maid was taking to the pantry,—an accident that had necessitated a recooking of the

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lunch ; details supplemented by an account of the haste with which Mrs. Uxhill had had Adelaide help dress her, and then, the cab arriving, with Mowgy and Nora, had driven away.

These details, which afterward became highly significant, did not at the time clarify matters in the least ; on the contrary, they made darkness deeper, so deep, indeed, that, in the depths of it, Uxhill inwardly felt himself going to pieces.

“It is like the Besalul affair,” he muttered at Stella, when, the questioning over, the servants had gone.

During the examination of the latter, during the story which had unfolded, and which had but amplified without elucidating the tale which the girl herself had told, her frightened look had retreated. From her shoulders responsibility was lifted. Her composure returned. She

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was as coldly beautiful as ever,—an icicle in a parlor ; in this instance in the parlor of a man.

“It is just like it,” Uxhill added. “Mrs. Besalul disappeared not long ago quite as inexplicably as Maud.”

He paused, gnawed at his moustache, looked down and away, then up at the girl.

“Have you any idea why she did this?”

“I, Mr. Uxhill?”

“Oh, if I ask,” he nervously resumed, “it is only because I am threshing about for a possible clew. I can’t fancy that she has run off with a man. Barring Jones, who no more counts than Patmore does, I have never seen her so much as look at one.”

At Mrs. Amsterdam’s, Stella had thought that Jones did count. But of the incident she said nothing. She had been seated. Now she stood up.

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"It is inexplicable. I don't understand, at all. At first, I am ashamed to say, I could only think of my own connection with it. Nominally, at least, your wife was in my care. Yet, even had I known, how could I have prevented her from leaving her house?"

In the unanswerableness of the query, she hesitated. "No, I could not have," she presently continued. "But, now I must leave it. I will send for my things."

Stella moved forward, a gloved hand extended, and with, in her face, an expression which Uxhill had not seen there before.

"At first I thought of myself. But, now I think of you. Believe me, you have my deepest sympathy."

"Thank you. I appreciate that you cannot stay. I thank you again. But, of course, you cannot go like this."

He touched a bell, ordered the

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brougham. When shortly it arrived, he accompanied her to the door, saw a footman precede her to the carriage, saw her enter it, saw her drive away, and, turning, saw that he was alone.

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## VIII.

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**I**N circumstances not similar, but cognate, women have sought consolation in prayer, men in drink. Uxhill made for the dining-room, where in decanters liquor stood. To him it was as though the end of the world had come. That Maud should get from a sick-bed, pick up the child, and go off as she had without a word of explanation, without the semblance of a pretext, without any cause whatever, without the formality of with-your-leave, or by-your-leave, without a line of farewell, without an expression of regret,—that she should do that, in a moment, after years of devotion, seemed to him as dynamic and disintegrating as though forces superterrestrial had torn the planet to bits.

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The analogy, if imaginative, was natural. His own little world had sundered. In the wreck of it he helped himself to brandy. At once from the glass there jumped the inevitable Why.

Hitherto, since his return from Wall Street, or more exactly since it had become obvious that those who composed his little world were gone, he had been conscious of a curious conviction that somehow, shortly, it would be all explained and set right ; that the disappearance was but an illusion which he was tricked into regarding as real. But, in crises, that is always the way. Human nature is so constituted that it must become at home with a catastrophe before it can credit that a catastrophe has occurred. The unawaited, when it chooses and pounces on a victim, does so with a celerity that stuns. There is a sense of nightmare, not of actuality, for that and



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the pain of it come later. At the shock you are but grappling with the intangible and the void, with things that you feel must be dream, though you know they are death.

It was precisely the temporary absence of pain, which makes men suddenly maimed unaware at first that they are even hurt, that had enabled Uxhill to comport himself before Stella and the servants almost phlegmatically. Not until the girl had left the house and he had breathed its atmosphere of desolation, did he realize that the worst that could be had been done.

Then, from the brandy, there jumped the Why.

It is conscience that disturbs the sinner, not the sin. The first Because on which Uxhill hit was a memory, finger-pointed, of the emotions that the headiness of Stella had induced. Yet, of these

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emotions the girl herself was ignorant. They could not have precipitated this catastrophe, for Maud was ignorant of them also,—unless, indeed, she had suddenly developed the power of clairvoyance.

That, of course, was impossible. And yet, in his quality of ex-freebooter, he knew, and none better, that in affairs of the heart a woman who really loves becomes really clairvoyant. But, clairvoyants make mistakes ; they know they do and admit it. Maud, he reflected, was too just to have abandoned him because of a doubt generated by what at best, or at worst, could be but a suspicion.

Then at once another query presented itself. Why had Maud gone without letting Stella know that she was going? Why, too, had she gone at a moment when the girl was practically in the one part of the house where she would be unaware that Maud was leaving it? Why, indeed,

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he decided, unless Maud believed that she was in league with him and would telephone him or otherwise circumvent her. Yet, in that event, if through some vagary of the sick-room, Maud did believe the girl in league with him, why should she believe also that the girl would attempt to detain her? In a presumable league of this kind, Maud's departure would be the one result desired,—there would have been no attempt at circumvention ; facilities rather. The deduction, obviously, was inadmissible. Obviously, also, there was something else. But, what?

Uxhill, casting about, drank again. From the brandy an idea emerged tortuously, vaguely, without form at first, but which, little by little, assumed proportions dim yet monstrous,—that Maud, far from fancying Stella in league with him, was herself in league with Stella.

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In league for what he did not at the time stop to consider. What he alone considered was the fact that he knew nothing whatever about this girl except what Sayce had told, and the sum and substance of that she might have invented for him.

At the idea he entered a cabinet where the telephone stood, rang up, got Sayce, and asked could he come to him.

Sayce said he would. Uxhill turned away.

The sheer contrast between the girl's position and appearance had necessarily occurred to him before, but not as it then did, revealing suddenly inordinate possibilities, and among them the idea that for some reason, at present elusive but perhaps presently apprehensible, she had first got Maud to go, and then, while arranging to join her, had stayed behind to throw dust in his eyes. In what manner,

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through what lures and wiles, she had induced Maud to go at all, was, indeed, incomprehensible ; yet, was not the entire episode so extraordinary that only the most extravagant conjecture could hit it?

Besides,—for here was a matter which until then he had not recalled,—the conjecture, however extravagant, elucidated the tears of the morning. By what had they been induced except by regret? The plot to leave him must have been long conceived. When he had pressed her hand as it lay on the silk there had been an answering pressure from it. The tears were tears of remorse at what she was planning to do, and the pressure of her hand on his meant that he was to forgive and forget her.

Yet, what was he to forgive, and why forget? Assuming that it was all as it appeared,—that she had, indeed, arranged

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to go with that girl, why had she done so, and where?

Where, indeed! Before his imagination could vagabond again, a servant, announcing Sayce, appeared.

"How are we?" said the physician, who, however, had an air of knowing pretty well in advance.

Although the servant knew, too, it was not until the man was out of hearing that Uxhill spoke.

"My wife has left me."

At this, Sayce, who had been standing, sat down, and Uxhill, who had been seated, stood up.

"She has taken Mowgy and, I fancy, Miss Sixmith, unless it should appear that Miss Sixmith took them."

Sayce, always red in the face, got, if possible, redder. He sprang to his feet.

"You have been drinking," he announced, though not at all by way of ac-

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cusation,—as a statement simply, one which, an effect produced, disclosed the cause.

“Yes,” Uxhill answered. “A thimbleful or two. But, I did not begin until they had gone. Moreover, I am not drunk. I wish I were.”

“No ; not that, perhaps. But, certainly not yourself. Otherwise, not for a moment would you connect a noble, true-hearted girl with a matter unfortunate enough already. Not ten minutes ago, when you called me up, she had just told me of it. She feels it keenly, not only on your account, who have spoken of her so outrageously, but because of Mrs. Uxhill.”

“Ah!” said Uxhill. He found but that. Yet, then the sense of desertion had increased. Sayce’s outburst had carried away his only theory. “As a matter of fact,” he added lamely, “I don’t now quite see how I did come to

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suspect her. But, I did not suspect, either, that you would take it so to heart."

"I could not help myself," Sayce, fuming still, replied. "If you knew her as I do, you would know, too, that there is not any one anywhere with ideals loftier than hers. But, no matter about that. Do you want me to advise you?"

"Advise me! I wish to God you would."

"Get the police to find the cabman—"

"And have it all in the papers?"

"It will probably get there anyway. No; find the cabman; then you will know, if not where they are, at least where they have gone, after which you will be the best judge of what to do."

"You see," said Uxhill, "what I don't understand is, why they are anywhere but here."

At the table before him, Sayce looked down, and on it with his fingers beat a



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brief tattoo. But, shortly he looked up at Uxhill.

“You remember, do you not, my telling you that your wife had something on her mind?”

“I do. But, if you mean by that, that what she had there was a man, you are wrong. She is not that kind.”

Sayce nodded. “The mind has many a cellar. In them strange tenants prowl. Tenants so strange that, for lack of a better term, we call them secondary personalities. Frequently they are inert. You only know that they are about when they make you wonder why you did this, or why you said that. But, in certain cases of shock, of cerebral excitement,—in other cases, too, of which the causes are more obscure,—from inert they become active and produce just such mysterious disappearances as that of your wife.”

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Significantly Uxhill tapped his forehead.  
“You mean that she—”

“I mean that there are men, and also women, who develop a sort of spontaneous somnambulism in which their former individuality lapses and a new one appears,—an individuality so distinct from the former that it requires and leads a totally different life. From certain indications which Miss Sixmith observed, and which she reported to me, I might attribute your wife’s disappearance to that, were it not that she took the child, a nurse for the child as well. In cases of this kind such forethought is unusual. Even so it does not invalidate the possibility. There is nothing that is not possible. The impossible is a term which psychology long since dropped from its lexicon. Hence, therefore, my suggestion about the cabman. Damn the papers! Supposing the facts do appear? They

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are not to your wife's discredit. She is not a free agent, and, beside her welfare, what is a little talk?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all. Only I don't like the idea of the police. I would rather not have them. I don't know whether you appreciate, but—"

"I do appreciate. Leave it to me. I know of a man on whom we can rely. He thinks I saved his life. I did not, but I have omitted to disabuse him of the idea. Let me see if I can get him."

Sayce went to the telephone. Uxhill ambled out into the adjoining room. Behind the theory which Sayce had presented there lay, of course, the intimation that Maud was out of her head. Yet, otherwise could she have left him as she had? Of course, she was out of her head, he told himself. But, he told himself, too, that when he found her he would call her back.

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This project Sayce interrupted. "He is not in. But his wife is. She tells me he is sure to be home for supper, and that then she will send him to me. I will go now to my office. When he comes I will set him to work at once."

Uxhill put a hand in a pocket. "Tell him that expense is of no moment. I have not much with me, but give him this."

A small roll of big bills which was then produced Sayce waved back.

"He won't require anything at present. When he does you shall know."

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## IX.

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SAYCE gone, up and down the drawing-room Uxhill stalked, feverishly, like a stricken animal that is trying to get away from its wound and from itself.

The possibility which Sayce had evoked, and which, while Sayce was there, he had accepted, fell away. It seemed to him stupid. On the subject of insanity he was not particularly posted, but he took it for granted that it does not nail you like that. In all the years of his life with Maud not once had she exhibited an eccentricity of demeanor.

From what he had read and remembered he rather felt that there must be a preliminary impairment of the brain, a predisposition due to heredity, to some long strain or sudden shock. In the ab-

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sence of something of that kind, people do not, he assured himself, go mad, causelessly, in five minutes. Sayce, of course, had not said she was mad; at least, not in so many words. But, the phrases in which the hint was enveloped amounted to that. He had talked about a form of somnambulism in which the individual evaporates and another appears.

Though Uxhill had swallowed the statement, he found now that it would not digest. Metaphorically he threw it up. In fiction it might go down. Unfortunately, this was not fiction,—it was fact. Yet, a fact, he immediately reflected, more inexplicable than any that the fiction with which he was familiar could show.

In an effort to solve the enigma of it, to get at the core of the thing and find there the Why, up and down the room he strode, reviewing the past, inter-

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rogating the future, floundering in a sea of memories and conjectures, his mind tossed by a storm of doubts in which he tried to see light somewhere, tried and failed,—tortured the while by the two great dissolvents, uncertainty and suspense.

Above, on the ceiling, the cupids lounged and laughed. It was only a little before that he had been yawning at them. It was only a little before that, at the piano there, Maud had been playing a gavotte, and in the pauses of the dance he had been urging a folding of tents, an escape to the blue of other skies. But, no; she had preferred her home. Now she had left it. Yet, why?

Always Uxhill got back to that. In the desolateness of the recurrent query he dropped on a sofa.

Someone came, asking would he dress, and getting no answer, departed. Some-

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one returned, telling him dinner was served. But, if Uxhill heard, he did not heed. He sat in a heap, staring at nothing ; hungry, indeed, but only for an answer to that Why.

Again someone came. Uxhill looked up. Sayce was before him.

"A lady has been found," Sayce announced. "I presume that another will be."

He paused, eyeing Uxhill. Then he added, "On leaving here I found our man, told him what had occurred. He went off with his nose to the ground. Ten minutes ago he telephoned me that he was on the trail. I told him that if he got to where it led to, to-night, to telephone here."

Uxhill stood up. Time must have touched him. He looked worn and gray.

"I misunderstood you. For a moment I thought you meant Maud."



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"I said a lady," Sayce answered, eyeing Uxhill as before. "But not this lady. It is Mrs. Besalul who has been found. In a rose-garden on the Pacific, if you please, and with a person whom no one had ever heard of."

"A secondary person, I suppose. Do you know, Sayce, I have been thinking that over. Whatever may or may not be the matter with Maud, it is not that. She hadn't a vagary to her name."

Sayce smiled. "So you think, forgetting that you yourself told me that she had a marked aversion to going anywhere. That is more than a vagary. It is a disorder, one of the many phobias that pathology has learned to recognize, and to which, in sheer elation, perhaps, it has given Greek names. There is oikophobia, which is the antithesis of your wife's aversion. Oikophobia is the dread of going home. You may have

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noticed cases of it in club-land. Then there is phronemophobia, or dread of thought, which I have noticed in Vanity Square. Then, too, there are the antipathies for open places, for closed places, for heights, complicated occasionally by dread of boats and cars. These phobias are obsessions. Generally they are benign. But sometimes they become acute. They lead to what we call fixed ideas. The presence of an idea fixed, but erroneous, is one of the tests of dementia."

"Do you mean that a vagary of this kind induces the spontaneous somnambulism of which you spoke?"

"By no means. But the presence of the one is not incompatible with the appearance of the other. On the contrary."

"All the same," said Uxhill dropping wearily again on the sofa, "I cannot credit it."

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“You cannot credit what?” Sayce asked, as he also sat down.

“Secondary personality. Have you ever met a case of it in your practice?”

“In my own, no. But in the practice of others, yes. I met, for instance, a Miss Marchbanks. This young woman, who is collectively known as the Misses Marchbanks, has successively disclosed six distinct personalities. If ever, like some of my colleagues, I go in for writing novels, there would be the type I would take. In fiction, as you get it to-day, a man more often than not is discovered wearying of one lady and falling in love with another. The occurrence is common, and therefore trite. Nevertheless, a proper appreciation of our national hypocrisy curbs any desire on the part of the fabulist to make the man in love with both. No right-thinking reader would stand for that. But, what opportunities there would be

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were the hero, when wearying of the heroine, to fall in love with a secondary personality whom, conveniently, she had developed, and so on through successive multiplications of herself? A story such as that would provide a rational interpretation of paradise. Mohammed, you know, promised the faithful a fresh houri every day. Every day is, perhaps, excessive. We may assume that the faithful could diet if they chose. But, a story of this kind would show that paradise is realizable here. It would show that, but win the hand of a multiple lady, and there you are."

"You would hardly be there with Miss Sixmith," Uxhill, with curious inappositeness, remarked. "Nor I," he added, "with Maud."

"Miss Sixmith!" Sayce exclaimed, "has a nature that is at once very simple and very direct. It could no more

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deviate than could a star from its course. But—" he paused, a finger raised. "Isn't that the telephone?"

He stood up. Uxhill got up also. Together they went to the cabinet beyond.

"Here," Uxhill said, after a moment, handing as he spoke the receiver to Sayce. "It is for you."

"Is that you, John?" Sayce called. "Well?"

A moment elapsed, another passed. Then the physician, putting the receiver down, turned to Uxhill.

"Your wife and child left for Boston on the three-o'clock to-day."

Surprise lifted Uxhill visibly like a lash. "The devil! She has gone to her father." Then vexation sank him. "But," he cried, "they have not spoken in years. What did she go to him for?"

Yet manifestly he was pleased. In his

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tired eyes was a smile, weary and relieved.

Sayce consulted his watch. "It is late—for Boston. It seems to me, though, that—"

"Why, of course," Uxhill, divining what he was about to suggest, exclaimed, "I will call them up."

It was a little, though, before the number could be got, a little more before the connection was made. Finally he called: "Is this Bishop Upjohn's? Yes; very good. I am Mr. Uxhill. Please tell Mrs. Uxhill that I want to speak to her."

He turned to Sayce. "It is all right. Whoever is at the other end says, hold the wire."

Uxhill did hold it. He held it until he found that he had been rung off. Assuming a mistake, he asked for the connection again, desisting only when, after repeated calls, he was told that they did not answer.

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Whether by "they" was meant the bishop or Maud, or both, or whoever had answered in the first instance, was, of course, uncertain. There remained, though, a fact which at once consoled and irked, the fact that you can be audible to people who are not audible to you. It made him feel like a blind man talking to a deaf mute,—a man, purposely blinded, talking to one whose deafness and muteness were assumed.

But, as Sayce had said, it was late—for Boston. Besides, Maud, tired by the trip, presumably had gone to bed. Nonetheless, the balm of the sudden relief, after the torture of the long suspense, was rather impaired. It was as though just as he was putting a hand on Maud, she had evaporated.

Uxhill felt cheated. What he felt he looked. What he looked, Sayce saw, and, seeing, prescribed for.

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“It is eleven-thirty. There is a train at midnight. Take it. Anything is better than inaction.”

By way of answering Uxhill pressed a button.

In reply Patmore appeared. “Will you dine, sir?”

“Get some things into a bag, enough for a day or two, and have a cab here at once.”

“Yes, sir ; thank you, sir. But, won’t you eat anything at all, sir?”

Uxhill turned on his heel. Patmore disappeared.

When presently he reappeared it was to say that the bag was on the cab, and the latter at the door.

In the interim Sayce scrawled a note.

“Here,” he said, “is something for you. There is not a chance in a hundred that you will need it. But should the chance occur it may be handy.”



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## X.

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**I**N Beacon Street, the next morning, Uxhill was standing at the door of a little house. After the metallic roar of New York the calm of Boston is sedative.

Uxhill did not notice it. On arriving a few hours previous, he had gone to a hotel and had tried to sleep. On the train he had been unable to. Hitherto, once his head on the pillow and he was off, immediately, for a ten-hour stretch. Such a thing as not getting to sleep was a novelty, a strange one, as now everything else was. But at the hotel he had seen a little man, with sneering eyes, who appeared to be making faces at him. The little man vanished vaporously as he had come. Uxhill awoke. He had slept

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fully ten minutes. Then he tubbed abundantly, ordered coffee, dressed leisurely, and, going forth to a shop on the Common, got some toys, got a cab for them. Now he was at the door of a house in which there was a telephone that at times did not answer.

The door opened. On the wide flagging of the hall a maid stood, aproned and capped, very white in her gingham.

"This is Bishop Upjohn's, is it not? Yes. Will you please say to Mrs. Uxhill that Mr. Uxhill is here."

Retreating before him, the maid reached a room at the left of the hall, in which, though she said nothing, he inferred that he was to wait. There a window gave on the street and from it he looked out. But, while he had not noticed the quiet of that street, he noticed now the quiet of this house. It was soundless. Mowgy, he reflected, would ruffle it. At thought

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of her, he remembered the toys and looked at the cab where they were.

“Mr. Uxhill, I believe?”

Noiselessly there had entered a man, in undertaker black, with a high clerical waistcoat, a thin face, and inquiring eyes. He was rubbing his hands, his back a trifle bent, his head a bit to one side, in an attitude jesuitically civil.

“The bishop charges me to say that he is unable to receive you.”

Uxhill started. “No one wants him to. I did not come for him. I came for my wife.”

“Quite so. But Mrs. Uxhill is not here.”

“She was here last night.”

“Regarding that I have no information.”

“You mean you have none for me. What is your name, sir?”

“Wix.”

“Wix, is it? Well, Mr. Wix, I charge

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you to tell the bishop that I am at the Touraine, and that if, within an hour, I do not receive information regarding my wife and my child, I shall proceed against him for harboring the one and sequestering the other."

At this, Mr. Wix, who was still rubbing his hands, smiled and arched his eyebrows. It seemed to Uxhill that he curiously resembled the little man who had come to him in dream. But, obviously, everything there was to say had been said. He made for the hall and to the door, yet that door Wix reached before him.

"Permit me," he said, his eyebrows arched, smiling still, and opened it. "Good morning," he said as Uxhill passed out, and noiselessly behind him closed it.

Uxhill told the cabman to go to the hotel, and got in among the toys.

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Here was a fresh kettle of fish. He felt as men do who have taken *cannabis indica*. Everything that was not out of proportion was blurred. Matters of supreme importance were occurring, matters of which he was the starting-point, matters that concerned him vitally; and yet, between him and them, was an interposition intangible and malign that shrouded what it did not distort.

To the enigma of Maud's disappearance was superposed the puzzle of the bishop's affront. Uxhill knew well enough that if Maud had not gone to her father, then the mere fact of his inquiring for her would have demonstrated that there was a screw loose; to the adjustment of which, the bishop, however at odds with him, would have joined. On the other hand, if Maud had not gone to her father, it was nevertheless clear that the latter knew where she had gone, and knew

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also the Why. One person, therefore, who was behind the scenes refused to come out.

“But,” Uxhill muttered, “by God, I’ll make him.”

At the moment, he regretted that the restraining conventionalities which dwarf us all had prevented him from forcing his way to the bishop and compelling him to disgorge. But the enervating civility of Wix, who had managed to be both obsequious and insolent, had exasperated him. Instead of going to work, he had dissolved into threats.

Anything of that kind is always very stupid. But it is, perhaps, stupider to make threats and then omit to enforce them. Particularly, if you have the ability. The ability was in Uxhill’s pocket. He got out the letter which Sayce had given him and redirected the cabman to the address that it bore. The

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address was that of Tatum & Tate, attorneys and counsellors-at-law, neither of whom, when Uxhill reached their office, happened to be about.

Uxhill waited. The office, dingy and green, lighted by gas, the walls wainscoted with high shelves of brown books, was tenanted by two clerks, a small boy and a girl. On one side was a door with a glass panel, on which was inscribed "Mr. Tatum." Opposite was another door dedicated to Mr. Tate. As Uxhill sat, the girl looked at him covertly from a typewriter. To her, with his worldly air, his handsome head, his appearance indicative of all the accessories of wealth, he seemed to have stepped from a story. Rather a sad one, had she known, which, of course, she did not, and she told herself how "elegant" it would be to have him for beau.

Of these sentiments, Uxhill was entirely

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unconscious. In his heart was anger, in his head an ache. He got up, strode about, examining the books, until finally he found himself contemplating the small boy, who was telling him that Mr. Tatum was in.

Mr. Tatum was a large, fierce man, who looked like a chuckerout, and whose voice, which was infantile in its gentleness, contrasted almost tragically with the aggressiveness of his appearance.

“And so,” he lisped, when Uxhill had told him what there was to tell, “you would like to have Bishop Upjohn hanged. That is the proper spirit. But we have no evidence. We have only hearsay and supposition. Your wife may or may not be in Boston. If we can learn that she is in Beacon Street, the best course will be to get a writ and send it with a sheriff. If Mrs. Uxhill has any defence, I presume she will produce



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it ; and if not, the child will be awarded to you, and where a child goes, usually the mother follows. But, however consoling it would be to hang the bishop, we cannot do so at this minute. Hanging, if hanging there is to be, must come later. Meanwhile, I enjoy relations, both personal and professional, with Mr. Forster, who is his legal representative. He will appreciate the situation, which is most unusual ; and I can almost guarantee that he will aid me to rearrange it without the necessity for proceedings which, if possible, it is always best to avoid."

"It is a damned outrage, all the same," said Uxhill.

"Now, if I understand you correctly," Tatum, in his purring voice, resumed, "you are unaware of any good and sufficient reason why this lady should have left you."

"I am aware of no reason of any kind,

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nature, or description ; good, bad, or indifferent."

"And—pardon me—no ground for supposing that she had any interest in—er—well, elsewhere?"

"Still less."

"No," Tatum, after a brief introspection, soliloquized, "women, when they elope, don't take children with them."

"They bring them back," he was about to add, but he judged the humor ill-timed.

"Now—er—yesterday, when you saw her last, you say she was ill and in bed?"

"With a nurse on one side and a specialist on the other."

"And what was the nature of her malady?"

"Oh, nothing of moment; a slight indisposition. But, last evening Sayce said that a secondary personality developing within her may have confiscated her faculties."

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Tatum bowed gravely, as though such confiscation were a thing, like death, which no one may avoid.

"Yes," he almost cooed; "but, even so, it does not explain the bishop's attitude."

"On the contrary, it aggravates it. That is why I said he ought to be hanged."

"And, as I said, that is the proper spirit. But, perhaps, when I have the pleasure of seeing you again, you may consent that his life be spared. Where are you stopping? At the Touraine? Very good. In an hour, in two at most, you shall hear from me."

"Thank you," said Uxhill, who got back to the cab and drove to the hotel.

The toys he had carried to his room, and among them he sat, confident now that shortly a line would come saying that the bishop, recognizing the error of

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his ways, was anxious, with eager apologies, to reunite him to his daughter.

Or, did he dream it? Anyway, a hall-boy, announcing Mr. Tatum, awoke him.

Uxhill stood up, rubbing his eyes, the fringes of the vision about him. Yet, when the lawyer entered, though he looked quite as much like a prize-fighter as before, he looked, too, like a heavy-weight after an unexpectedly ardent scrimmage.

"Mr. Uxhill," he began, in his caressing voice, "I fear that perhaps our friend Sayce is right. I am not an alienist, but I will wager a good red pippin that you are perfectly *compos mentis*."

"I certainly am," said Uxhill, a bit dashed by this prelude. "But, why? Why do you say that?"

"Because, if you are sane, your wife is not. On the other hand, if she is sane, I lose my pippin."

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“But, why? Why do you say all this? Have you seen her?”

“I have seen Forster, who has seen the bishop. Mr. Uxhill, neither your wife nor your child is in Boston. Forster assured me of that, and you can believe him.”

“Then where are they?”

“That I do not know. But, though you may see your child again,—for no one can prevent you if you can find her,—I doubt if you see your wife.”

“What!”

“The bishop told Forster that on information and belief, derived, I must assume, from this lady,—for, though Forster did not say it was so derived, he intimated that such was the case,—on this information and belief, the bishop asserts that you are crazy.”

“The devil he did! Damnation! Is there any way of getting him to put that in writing?”

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"To what end?"

"To have him arrested for libel. Never in the world could my wife have suggested such a thing about me."

Tatum made a gesture. In it, in his voice, too, was infinite indulgence. "When a lady leaves her husband, she must have an excuse. It is not an excuse, or hardly a valid one, to declare that he is everything he ought to be. She must find something else. When, therefore, he is notoriously good and kind, invariably she says that he is crazy, and everybody believes and sympathizes with her. It is a great world."

Uxhill gnawed at his moustache.

"I am crazy," he announced, "or she is. I said that at the start."

"You are a bit excited, perhaps. But not crazy. If you are, it is a pity that there are not more lunatics like you. Yours, though, is an extraordinary case,

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—from one aspect. From another it is quite common. In domestic life the development of secondary personalities is more frequent than you might suppose; only husbands do not, as a rule, happen on such an exhilarating term for it. The term incompatibility, if less suggestive, is more exact. Many is the man who has awaked to the discovery that he is married to a lady to whom he has never been introduced. Without presuming to intrude my domestic experiences upon you, I myself have done so. But, I have consoled myself, and very greatly, with the reflection that it is better for a man to have loved his wife than never to have loved at all. Do you not agree with me? By the way, that is a very pretty doll that you have there.”

In the *débris* of the disaster in which Uxhill was sinking the remark was like a rope. He caught at it and swam up.

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"Have you any children?" he asked.

"Ten," Tatum placidly replied.

"Then do me the favor to let me send the doll to you, and the other toys, that I got for my little girl. I do not want to lug them back to New York, and it would be distressing to think of them as foundlings."

"They shall be properly adopted. I thank you very much. My children will be fathers and mothers to them. But, did you intend returning to-day?"

"I do not see that I can do anything here."

"Not for the moment. But the bishop is aware of the advantage of the avoidance of publicity. Forster will, I think, furnish me shortly with your wife's address, or with that of attorneys with whom you may communicate. They know that you won't let matters rest as they are. It would be inconceivable if



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you did. What they are after is the time necessary in which to arrange some *modus vivendi*."

"In other words, they are sparring for wind. Now, then, is the time to hit."

"If you could get them, yes. But you can't. We might possibly badger the bishop by instituting a suit for alienation. But what good would it do? On the other hand, you can, if you like, proceed against your wife in New York, get a decree of separation and the custody of the child. But, I think that what you have chiefly to consider is, that disappearances are deceptive. Barring the fact that the bishop says that you are crazy, and Sayce says your wife is,—and you say that one or the other is right,—there is nothing to explain the present situation, and I take it there will be nothing until Forster comes to me, which he may do to-morrow."

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"If he does, you will inform me?"

"You may rely on it."

Then presently Tatum withdrew, and shortly Uxhill was whirling back to New York, where a bill for services rendered whirled after him.

It was some time, though, before he could attend to it.

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## XI.

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**I**N certain conditions a trip on a train is not a sedative. When to these conditions is added the conviction of defeat, a journey may become demoralizing. On the way back to New York, Uxhill was at once conscious of defeat, and conscious also that the consciousness of defeat comes, when come it does, always from within. A man who is a man should never know that he is beaten. Though he suspect it, he should never admit it, even—and particularly—to himself.

Uxhill, aware of that, fought against any idea of being downed. But, circumstances were against him. He had gone to Boston with what amounted to a certainty that, no matter what surprises awaited him, at least he would know where he was, and,

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so knowing, know also what to do. Instead of which, not only was the Why as intangible as ever,—its poignancy was intensified by the attitude of the bishop. The latter's age, his cloth, his eminence, the fact that he was Maud's father, not one of these things would have protected him had he been on that train.

Uxhill felt quite murderously toward him, yet far less because of what he had said than because of what he had not. He had been vastly annoyed at the charges which Tatum had brought, but the annoyance, however vast, was slight by comparison with his anger at the bishop for not disgorging the Why.

That is what he wanted, that and nothing else. It was for that he had gone to Boston, and to come away without it spelled something like defeat. Mentally he ravened, and for a while lost himself in the remembrance of strange

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tortures and of the pleasure that it would give him to see the bishop undergoing the strangest and most torturesome of the lot.

The evil mood passed. A gentleman, it has been said, should be too indolent to bear malice. Uxhill was a poor hater. With the landscapes through which the train shot the evil mood sank back. After all, he subsequently told himself, were a man to elope with a daughter of his, as he had eloped with the bishop's, he might not feel conversationally inclined to him, either. Then, too, from what he knew of the bishop, it was quite on the cards that he should regard Maud's flight as the just retribution of his sins. But, though the evil mood passed, this eminently benign view was not reached until many other things had supervened. It is not easy to be philosophic all at once. At the time the mood was helped away

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by the realization that the bishop at most, or at worst, was but an accessory before the fact,—that the real criminal was not he ; it was Maud.

Yet, why was she that? Why had she done what she had? To know, to get at the truth, though truth were an acid, he would have drained it. However it corroded, the pain would be less acute than the disintegrating agony of suspense.

Truth should be charming or else withheld. But, charming or otherwise, it was not forthcoming then. Only a vulgar whiskey and soda was obtainable for the thirst of this man, outwearied by twenty-four hours of ceaseless emotion.

Truth was not apprehensible then. But, later, through processes devious and contradictory, which he could neither co-ordinate nor comprehend, into the depths of his tired being there filtered the con-

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viction that somehow, in some way, it was all unreal.

An idea, not similar but cognate, he had found himself entertaining at the start. But that idea was due to sheer bewilderment. It was an idea like that which visits the absent-minded who have an object in their hand one minute and cannot find it there the next. They know that it cannot have dematerialized. They know that presently it will turn up under their nose. Because Maud's disappearance had been utterly inexplicable, Uxhill, for that very reason, felt that it must shortly be explained.

But that feeling had gone. In its place came an apperception, at first opaque and elusive, yet gradually tangible and more clear, that all that had occurred, all that was occurring, were but pictures floating by, pictures picturing nothing, images without significance,

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dreams woven together in a dream of themselves.

At this conception, Uxhill marvelled. It seemed to him chimerical. But, in certain crises, we get used to chimeras. The soul makes itself at home with what it must. When the soul of Uxhill did accustom itself to this ideal idealism, Uxhill himself was in New York.

On leaving Boston he had wired Patmore. On reaching town a groom met him, took his bag, piloted him to the brougham, scaled the box, saw him to his house.

The house was quite as he had left it, only, while his hopes had been diminishing, its desolation had increased. And why was it desolate? Ah, dear God, if he only knew!

It was not in search of an answer, it was for the mere companionship of familiar things, for the atmosphere which



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Maud had breathed, that, after a futile effort at eating something, he went to her room, went from it to Mowgy's, looked at the spectral crib, at the little things infinitely precious which she allowed no one to touch, thought of the incredible tales he had improvised for her there, and wandered back to Maud's room, where other things held for him the pain which only such things in such circumstances can hold,—the pain made of memories and regrets.

The top of the dressing-table, previously covered with futilities in gold, was bare. A drawer beneath it, which sometimes he had seen Maud open, and which, on such occasions, always had been filled, was bare, too, entirely empty, save for a little book.

For the solace of handling what she had held, he took it up. It was a volume of verse. He turned the pages

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and read that Joy should be majestic, equable, sedate. But, to Joy he was a stranger. He was about to put the book down when lines underscored jumped at him :

“When I was young I said to Sorrow,

‘Come and I will play with thee.’

He is near me now all day.

And at night returns to say,

‘I will come again to-morrow,

I will come and stay with thee.’ ”

He read them, read them again. They had their meaning. But, what? He looked around. The walls did not answer. The bed was dumb. The table, the chairs, were silent.

Then from the room he went, closing the door closely as though to shut there something he knew not what,—something, though, that must have managed to escape, something that must have got out with him, something that crept after him down the stair, dogging him stealthily to

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the dining-room below, where, in nameless horror, at his side it crouched, plucking at his sleeve, drawing him into labyrinthine darknesses, holding to him semblances of sudden light, torturing him with their abrupt extinction, impelling him to find the Why, demanding that he unearth the Sorrow; prodding him insistently, in the ways so lancinant, that the pain of them, prolonging, expanded into those excesses from which insensibility proceeds.

Pain has her anæsthetics. Pain can plunge the soul of the agonized into depths of torture where no further hurt can go. Into those depths the soul of Uxhill sank.

From them, reascending, he started on another journey, one from which men have returned, but none ever as they went.

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## XII.

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**I**N dream everything is possible, or, rather, everything seems possible to him who dreams. On the uplands of that wonderful country to which sleep conveys us, faces that we never saw, forms we shall never behold, delights we shall never enjoy, beckon, palpitate, advance and retreat. Though they loiter, they do not linger. Sometimes in tumults of farewells they disappear. Sometimes, silently as they have come, they go. Sometimes you are unaware they have appeared until they are upon you, then as nebulously they are gone, vanishing through gaps to their eyries, from which they have emerged but for a second, though that second seem to you years.

Yet, however they appear and disap-

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pear, however inconstant their return, however they disturb or delight, however illusory they may be, perhaps they are but a prefigurement of life which itself is a dream from which at death we awake.

In the insensibility to which the soul of Uxhill had been sunk, semi-breves stirred, lightly, as leaves stir when birds pass ; faintly, in the little whispers that woods have at dawn ; floatingly, in murmurs and low trills. The soul of the man was seeking an issue from its tenement of flesh, seeking another whom it could not find.

The threading whispers augmented, the murmurous trills increased, mounting gradually, yet sheerly, in reverberations so sonorous that they melted into luminous circles which radiated, distended, contracted, revealing in their transformations multi-colored perspec-

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tives where a sphinx, orange-haired, vesuvian-eyed, smiled and sank away.

The sounds decreased, the colors decomposed. There was but darkness, in which the soul of Uxhill groped until, caught in a current, it was tossed into shadowy spaces where figures, very dim, serpented ceaselessly in haste toward a point far away where a flame burned spirally, and from which, like balls from a Roman candle, face after face, all of them smiling, each of them orange-haired, vesuvian-eyed, flew upward and disappeared.

The soul of Uxhill sought to follow, but forgot them in a region shuttled with wide avenues of transversal streets, at the corners of which the furtive forms of women, balancing themselves undecidedly, hesitantly appeared and, immediately, like frightened swallows, fluttered suddenly from sight.

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Remotely stretched rows of houses, their sculptured doors widely hospitable, their windows opening candidly. Within were serene retreats, chambers furnished with capricious care, the flooring parquettèd with pomegranates, the ceilings covered with cashmeres. As the faces had faded, as the forms had flown, the windows closed, the wide doors shut, silently, mysteriously, almost smilingly.

Beyond was a plain strewn with flowers and girls, indistinguishably fair, indistinguishably intermingled, as indistinguishable, in paradise, girls and flowers are. Yet, over the girls that were flowers, and the flowers that were girls, a blankness intervening hid them, their perfumes and smiles.

But, at once, in a garden, from behind bushes of roses, a woman emerged. As she moved the folds of her dress glistened with changing hues, increasing her height

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demeasurably. With her changing folds the garden mounted. Upward with her girdle the roses grew. The plain joined itself to her. From behind the blankness the flowerful girls ascended, mingling their beauty with hers. The rows of houses with their candid windows lifted themselves in her train. The wide avenues of transversal streets, the shadowy spaces, the luminous circles, the remote horizons, the decomposing perspectives, the sounds, the colors, the world itself, rose with her, and, rising, soared further, further yet into voids, into chaos, where like a bubble it burst.

At that absence of anything, in which all things were returned to the indeterminate, dissolved there into primal fluidity, divested of substance and design, at this nothingness, in which he himself disappeared, Uxhill, or the soul of him, stared.

And still he stared.



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Long hours later, Patmore, entering the dining-room, as was his morning custom, found Uxhill there, a decanter before him. The hour, the decanter, the spectacle of Uxhill, an elbow on the table, a hand to his head, at once sufficed. Patmore knew that Uxhill was drunk.

Patmore did not blame him for that. Patmore was not censorious, and in omitting to be, reached, without suspecting it in the least, the heights which ages ago the founders of philosophy scaled.

Patmore, though not censorious, was observant, which is another and very excellent attribute of the sage. In the course of his observations, Patmore had never seen Uxhill drunk before. On the other hand, he was aware of what had occurred. Though not a drinking man himself, he rather felt that in similar circumstances he, too, would be drunk. In

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addition to indulgence and observation, Patmore had sympathy as well.

Patmore was only a butler. Yet, he possessed virtues to which a bishop might bow, and to which, if a bishop had bowed, Patmore would have felt exceedingly uncomfortable. To sympathy, indulgence, observation, Patmore added humility. Saint Francis would have called him brother.

Now, duty prompting, he inquired :

“Would you wish anything, sir?”

Patmore got no reply whatever.

“Coffee, sir? Or, perhaps, first your bath, sir?”

To these suggestions there was no reply, either, silence merely, but a silence that gave Patmore the creeps. It was the highly uncanny silence of a man staring at you with wide-open eyes that seemed in the white of them to pop from his head.

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Patmore, though observant, had, on entering, not observed that. The moment he did, indistinctively, his own eyes looked down over his own person. Assured that nothing was amiss with him, he looked again at Uxhill, who still was staring, yet, less at him than through him, at something behind, which Patmore could not see, and to which, when he turned, was but the tulipwood sideboard, the mirror of which showed back his own face.

A bit confused, Patmore evolved another question.

“You may not be feeling very well, sir. Would you wish me to call the doctor?”

To this there was still but that stare. In it, however, Patmore, now thoroughly frightened, ventured to affect to discern consent, and to it, after a moment's self-communion, he added :

“Yes, sir ; thank you, sir. I will do so at once.”



**PART II**

**THE WOMAN WHO PERSISTED**



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I.

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“**H**OW is Mr. Uxhill to-night?”

Sayce was inquiring, as a footman helped him from his coat.

“Thank you, sir. Miss Sixmith has been with him since noon. Mr. Watson is going to him now.”

“Yes. You might say to Miss Sixmith, please, that, before going up, I will thank her to give me a moment.”

Sayce turned into the drawing-room. On getting there that morning he had found Uxhill pretty much as Patmore had discovered him ; but finding, too, cutaneous insensibility, low temperature, defective respiration, complicated presently with incoherence, he had got him to bed, at the side of which shortly two nurses,

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one a man, the other a divinity, alternated.

“Well?” he began, when the goddess appeared. “Anything new?”

Collared and cuffed, aproned and capped, her blue dress striped with white, presenting generally a resemblance to the belle Chocolatière,—*mais en mieux*,—demurely, in her clear contralto, the divinity replied:

“No. The hypnogogic hallucinations continue.”

“Still thinks he does not exist?”

“And that nothing else does, either.”

“Not even you?”

“Me, least of all.”

With cheerful unconcern the physician smiled.

“To him you do not exist, to me you only do. His condition is merely unusual, mine is unique. Otherwise the cases are not dissimilar. He has lost



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his bearings. Without you I should lose my own. But, while his condition is temporary, mine is permanent. There is the real difference, and a big one it is."

He took her hand. With entire submission she let him hold it. Then slowly it was withdrawn.

"You are so good."

The smile fell from him. "Do you know that the day before yesterday was the birthday of my life?"

"I know that a girl needs protection."

"I know, too, that, however and how vainly I had hoped, it was not until the day before yesterday that I believed you would accept it from me. The tragedy of age is not that a man is old ; it is that he is young. That tragedy you made into a festival."

Through some miracle of love, Sayce had really succeeded in rejuvenating. His hair was white, but his skin, the

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color of brick, was unlined, his eyes were as luminous as her own. Yet, then, happiness is a great elixir.

To Stella no elixir was necessary. She was an elixir herself, solidified, in cold storage. But, having, perhaps, less enthusiasm for the subject in which he revelled, she changed it.

"Did I understand from you that Mr. Uxhill's condition is temporary?"

The little douche in the question dampened Sayce, if at all, but for the instant. The girl's reserve was one of the elements of the elixir which she exhaled, and not the least heady element, either. It was one, though, Sayce felt, which marriage would sublimate. That conviction evaporating the douche, he nodded serenely.

"Oh, yes. Through some strain, it may be through some shock, he has lost his memory. A counter-emotion is indicated."

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Stella patted her apron, adjusted a cuff.

“He cared a great deal for her, did he not?”

With a gesture that was familiar to him, Sayce ran a hand through his hair.

“Yes, and you see what love will do. Should anything separate us, my condition would be quite the same, unless it happened to be worse.”

“Which a counter-emotion would dispel,” the girl, with her rare smile, replied. Then, getting back to her muttons, she asked, “Do you know, at all, why she left him?”

“Oh, well, to him, poor devil, I suggested spontaneous somnambulism. You see, when we don’t know, we have to pretend to. Tell a perplexed patient that you are as perplexed as he is, at once you are a jackass. But, tell him he has a disturbance of the vasomotor

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nerves of the coeliac viscera, instantly he is reassured, and you are Cagliostro. Spontaneous somnambulism comforted Uxhill. Had I not suggested something for his mind to chew on, he would have sworn at me, and if I had intimated that it was another Besalul affair, he would have knocked me down."

"And you think it was that?" the girl, from the tips of her lips, distastefully inquired.

"What else is there to think? It was evident that she had something on her mind, and in this neighborhood what do women ever have on their mind except men—and money?"

"But, before I came here, did you not say that he was very wealthy?"

"Precisely. Her going, therefore, is explicable only on the man-theory. In Boston, Uxhill probably realized that. A reflex movement in the cerebral circu-

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lation ensued, from which a form of psychic paralysis has resulted. In the abeyance of consciousness the sense of his identity is dispersed. He seems to himself as having been, yet as no longer being, and exterior objects seem as though they no longer were. Physical individuality is but the aggregate of sensations emanating from the different organs, tissues, and movements of the body, and reperculated thence to the sensorium. As these are affected so is the individual. A change in them may produce anything, from a simple indisposition to a complete displacement of the centre of gravity. In such displacement the patient may believe anything imaginable and unimaginable, but whatever he believes is perfectly true, at least to him. It cannot help being true, for his consciousness is but the expression of his condition. In the present case the identity is dispersed. But, it

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can be got together again. The fragments are strewn about in the sub-cellars of the sensorium. In a shock they have sundered, in a counter-emotion they will coalesce."

"It is very curious."

"And even humorous. Uxhill thinks he does not exist. How modest that is ! The world is full of people who properly have no existence whatever, whose importance is that of gnats in the sun, and yet, who, through prodigies of imagination which psychology is incompetent to explain, fancy themselves great guns and great shakes. It would take more than an emotion, it would take shrapnel, to undeceive them. By the way, how does Watson do?"

"Very well ; he is with him now. As I was coming down here I heard Mr. Uxhill saying, 'Who am I?' and 'Why?' And I heard Watson telling

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him who he is, and that he would soon be right."

"Yes, that is indicated, but it is not enough. He has never seen Watson, while he knows you. If he could realize your presence he would begin to get his bearings. Shall we go up?"

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## II.

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THE next morning, Stella, relieving Watson, took her place in the room in which Uxhill lay. Under the influence of an opiate all night he had slept. He was still sleeping. Stella looked at him. He was good to look at. In looking she saw that the effects of the opiate were diminishing. Uxhill's eyes were closed. But occasionally he moved.

Stella had with her a book. She began to read it. It was a treatise in French on obscure derangements of the brain. The derangements were new to her. Being new, they interested. As pages turned they confronted her with men who thought themselves women, with women who thought themselves men, with others who thought themselves



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both. But these were not what she wanted. It was a case similar to Uxhill's that she sought. The index aiding, she found one.

It was the account of a young girl who thought herself isolated and transported far, very far, in a sphere in which there was but the darkness of thick clouds and shapes of strange sin, shapes which she did not know could be, and concerning which she brooded interminably, until one who loved her, breathing his name into her ear, dissipated the thick clouds, revealed her to herself and to the fact that she was not so far away,—at home merely and in bed.

The descent from the infernal to the commonplace amused Stella. She smiled, not frostily as she usually did, but with the rare seduction which, when she wished, she could display. As she smiled the white of her delicate skin suffused.

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It was as though there were claret in it.

She stood up, moved noiselessly to the bed, and, bending down, looked in Uxhill's face. He still was sleeping. She moved closer, bent nearer, and, pressing her lips to his ear, whispered to him.

He had been lying, his face to the wall, but now within him something stirred. He turned heavily. Without haste Stella retreated. He was muttering. Yet what, she could not tell. Presently he was silent. Stella waited. But, obviously, he had lapsed back. Then closer she moved, bent nearer, so near that his breath was in her hair, and, pressing her lips to the other ear, whispered again, but longly and so intensely that within him again something stirred, but more deeply.

He turned, this time on his back. His eyes opened. He rubbed them and looked after her, for she had retreated

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again, further than before, to the chair where she had sat.

Laboriously Uxhill raised himself on an elbow, passed a hand across his head, pulled at his moustache, his eyes still on Stella, not vacantly, but wonderingly, as though he could not make things out. But some of them, soon, he must have been able to. For in a moment he laughed queerly, and said, and quite confidently, too :

“You have not changed much.”

“No,” Stella repeated, providing him as she spoke with glimpses of her beautiful teeth. “Nor you.”

“Ah !” he answered absently, and seemed to meditate. “But it has been very long.”

“What has been long?”

“Since,—since I got here.”

“Not so very long, only a day and a night.”

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“A day and a night!” Uxhill repeated.  
“No. You are jesting.”

“Indeed, I am not.”

“It seems to me impossible. And you say a day and a night?”

“A day and a night, Mr. Uxhill. Shall I show you the calendar?”

Uxhill nodded, unconvinced. “I have been to odd places. I have seen odd things. Among them I lost something. What was it?” he interrupted himself to ask. “Something very important. Something vital. What could it have been? Ah! I remember.”

“Yes?” said Stella, encouragingly.

“Yes, I remember; it was Maud.”

Stella looked down at her book.

“Yes,” Uxhill resumed. “I looked for her in strange places, among strange things. She disappeared in them. Miss Sixmith?”

“Yes, Mr. Uxhill.”

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"You and I will never see her again."

To this the girl could have found no suitable reply. Her eyes were still on the book. She said nothing.

"No," Uxhill continued. "She has gone. I wish her well. But I shall not look for her any more. Between us eternity has begun."

He paused. "Miss Sixmith!"

"Yes, Mr. Uxhill."

"Has it really been but a day and a night?"

"A day and night since you have been in this room. A day and two nights since you returned from Boston."

"It is inconceivable."

Uxhill sank back. His eyes reclosed. For a while he was motionless.

Stella stood up again, moved forward and looked. He seemed to be sleeping, but she was not sure. She waited a mo-

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ment. In the corners of her perfect mouth another smile had bubbled. To her face the flush had returned. She moved closer, bent nearer. But something made her turn. Then the smile vanished, but the flush increased.

In the doorway stood Sayce.

Stella straightened like a reed. Where the smile had been two fingers went. Noiselessly, as she had gone to Uxhill, she moved toward Sayce, the fingers still on her lips, motioning him with the other hand back to the hall, where she followed, closing the door behind her.

Sayce, mystified by the graceful pantomime, stared.

"He is out of it," she announced. "I am so glad."

"H'm," mused Sayce. Then he added, "You look it. If I did not know you as I do, I could have sworn you were about to kiss him."

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But, if Stella heard the comment, she did not appear to have done so. Besides, explanations were not in her line.

"Yes," she continued. "I was reading. It was only five minutes ago. He spoke to me, called me by name. He was entirely rational. Just now he went to sleep again. He would hardly believe, though, that it has been a day and a night—"

"Thought it longer, did he?" Sayce interrupted. "That is usual. But, it has all turned out very well. He has had a normal return from the abnormal. If he is rational when he awakes, he will stay so. In which event there is no necessity for you to remain. There is no necessity, either, for him to know that you are so prodigiously glad. It might excite him, don't you see? But, when he awakes, let him have anything he wants. Humor him in everything. That is to say, you

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know, in everything reasonable. Where is Watson? Turned in?"

"Yes. He was here until I relieved him an hour since."

Sayce nodded. "If, when he is up again, Uxhill is then right, you had best go. Now I must go. Meanwhile, remember, no excitement; and, to avoid it, don't let him suspect that you are so pleased."

Sayce laughed and passed on. He was quite sure of the girl. Any excitement that Uxhill could derive from her would, he was aware, be meagre. However heady her appearance might be, her demeanor was very sobering. Entrancing as song, she was passionless as algebra, the true type of *femme forte*, the ideal companion,—when companionable she would consent to be.

That consent, long besought, only recently he had believed might be obtained.



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The belief had put a bird in his heart. It was singing there. But, until latterly, it had all been very uphill. From the first he had cared as only a man can care who has never cared before, at once prodigally and concentratedly, with that concentration which reduces the census to a single being.

She was that being. His whole life he felt he had been waiting for her, and then, when, suddenly, a delight and a desire, she did appear, it was with the attitude of a Madonna, with the air of a divinity offended at being looked at.

Sayce knew that he was less than she. But he knew, too, that it is from such knowledge that failure comes. He was careful to conceal it. It was his admiration that he disclosed, and which, at first, she put from her, but which, in the daily intercourse of ward- and sick-room that ensued, she ended by accepting, yet al-

## VANITY SQUARE

ways with reserve, with the effacement of a pupil praised by a teacher. Later, when the admiration became more personal, she listened as one does who is unwilling to be brusque and yet whom a topic wearies. When he persisted, as he did persist, she told him, as she had told Maud, that she did not intend to marry.

It was all quite hopeless, and so continued until that afternoon, a few days before, when, unstrung by Maud's unaccountable disappearance, she had gone to him for counsel. The counsel which she very naturally received was that she should take him. Then, for the first time, she consented to listen. But, then, it was the first time, too, that her pulse had not registered normal.

Not his, though. Nor had it registered normal since. That afternoon he accounted the birthday of his life. Since then in his heart a bird had been singing.

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It is true, she had not wholly consented. But capitulation is only a question of time with a castle that talks. The beleaguer had stormed it, and now, as he passed on, he told himself that soon its allurements would be his.

These allurements had their effect on Uxhill. Before Maud had gone he had been so fully aware of them that, conscience-pricked, he had for a moment attributed the going to some clairvoyant intuition of the emotions which they produced. A moment only, for at once he had seen that the cause was not that. In an effort to get at that cause, to rout out the why, he, too, had departed on a journey more mysterious than hers. Yet, wherever Maud may have gone, and whatever the cause of her going, his journey had, in a measure, resembled her own. In going she had left him. In returning he had left her. On the road to nowhere

## VANITY SQUARE

and back, somewhere he had strewn her. In leaving his home she had filled his heart. On his return that, too, was empty.

Absence may make the heart grow fonder, but, to do that, then between the absentee and the heart there must be reciprocity. Eliminate reciprocity and sooner or later, and generally sooner than later, the result is reducible to an Old World axiom, "Who goes to the chase, loses his place." Or hers, as the case may be. The axiom is not merely Old World, it is archaic. It is something higher. It is a law of Nature, who has many laws, no compunctions, and a few dislikes.

Chief among the latter is a vacuum. A vacuum is the residue of what remains of those whom the chase entices. A vacuum is Nature's pet detestation. Let the hunter omit to return and refill it, Nature

## VANITY SQUARE

promptly stuffs in the first thing that she finds.

The censorious allege that this is not right and may continue to, for all that Nature cares. Nature has no heed of the censorious or of anybody, or of anything, save her will and her way. A saint may defy her. Uxhill was not that by a long shot. He was a human being who had been made to suffer poignantly, who had been deserted and insulted for no reason at all, and who, as a result, had been forced on a journey from which some men return, but none ever as they went.

Of this Uxhill had found himself at once aware. In the halts of the journey it had been manifesting within him. To those that stood about, the journey, relatively, had been brief. Though to him it had been inordinate, its actual brevity could not minimize the result. Everything human is bound to pass away.

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The process of passing may be long or short. In either event the result is the same. In the case of Uxhill pathological conditions had so favored that, what ordinarily might have taken a lifetime, had been effected in one of those crises in which time is wiped out.

The only things that really are, are those which we believe to be. To Uxhill the duration of the journey had been inordinate. He accepted, though, the brevity of it. But that did not alter its effect. It was to him as though the episodes directly preceding it had occurred years since, years that in their progress had put mouldering hands on what had been and planted ivy where once grew the rose.

Maud, like a rose, had gone. Concerning the going Uxhill had now no ill feeling. He had no feeling at all. Even the wherefore of it had ceased to preoccupy him. That she had loved him he knew.

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But, he knew, too, that there are women who can both love and betray. On that score, too, he had no feeling.

What he chiefly felt was this : There are those who in departing leave behind them memories so toxic that they poison the lives of those whom they desert, memories so atrocious that they survive the forgetfulness of all things else. Maud, like the rose, had left but perfume. Yet that, too, had gone. Everything had. Between what had been and what was, already, as he had said and in saying believed, eternity had begun.

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### III.

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**I**N the existence of every one there are little oases in which life suffices unto itself. In one of them, Uxhill was resting. The resting consisted in looking at Stella. With her subtle ways and marmorean face, she was extremely reposeful, less so, perhaps, than the opiate he had had, but, certainly, more consoling.

Poppies and mandragora make you dull. An angel in the house will make you dream. Uxhill, latterly, had dreamed a great deal. He had dreamed of strange places in which something had disappeared; something in search of which he, too, had vanished. The memory of it was going. In its place another dream had come, one which it pleased him infinitely to look at. The balm of it con-



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trasted medicinally with the gaps and voids of the other.

In considering this dream, an hour passed. Poppies leave you without appetite, but beauty has many stimulants. It can excite the appetite also. Not ravenously, but appreciably, Uxhill's appetite was presently aroused.

He asked the time. It was high noon. Declaring that he would get up, he asked for Patmore.

Sayce had said nothing about that. He had, though, said that Uxhill was to be humored. Stella reflected on the possible injudiciousness of opposition. In reflecting, she withdrew. To replace her Patmore came. Then to luncheon presently Uxhill descended, perfectly clothed and otherwise in his right mind.

On descending the stair he had seen letters, piles of them, in heaps. Letters had always seemed to him very tedious.

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They bored him, less because of what they contained than because of what they never did contain. But he objected to them chiefly because those who write them regard you as rude if you omit to reply. People are so sensitive. The letters he passed, passed on to the drawing-room where the dream stood, a dream that had a hat, white gloves, and a coat of black fur.

He remonstrated at once :

“But you are not going?”

“But I must.”

“At least not before luncheon.”

The dream hesitated. Hesitancy was rare with her. Always she knew what there was to do and did it. But, on this occasion, she let herself be persuaded. The gloves came off, the coat, too, though not until she had stipulated that, luncheon over, she should go at once.

To all of which Uxhill assented. It

## VANITY SQUARE

had been part of his buccaneer training always to say "Yes" to women. He found that, besides pleasing, it gave them a chance to change their mind. Then, too, it is so ill-bred to insist. Partly, therefore, from habit, partly, too, because he saw no reason why the luncheon should not indefinitely prolong, he yielded with entire grace, and at table, with a view, perhaps, to showing that he was himself again, talked first about insects, then about stars, the infinitely great, the infinitely little, the only subjects worth discussing by those who have nothing else to discuss.

But, presently, talk drifted into channels more personal. As was customary at luncheon in this house, there were no servants about, and Uxhill, after having eaten quite enough to have satisfied a bird,—a bit of bread and a few berries, asked the dream where, on leaving, she proposed to go.

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"To my lodgings," the dream replied.

"You would not, I suppose, consent to stay here even if I went elsewhere."

"Of course not."

"I appreciate that. You regard me as a married man."

To this the dream made no answer. It did not deserve one.

"Whereas," Uxhill continued, "I am a widower."

On the dream's fork was a bit of orange that had bathed with other fruit in Maraschino. She put the fork down and looked at him reproachfully. A subject so intimate, personal, and delicate, it was hardly fair of him to produce.

But, the look he misinterpreted. The reproach he took for surprise.

"Indeed, I am," he retorted. "It is true, I have no tombstone to show, but I propose to get one."

## VANITY SQUARE

In the grewsomeness of the project, Stella looked away.

Uxhill, however, was not to be rebuffed.

“I propose to get a divorce.”

Stella went back to her orange. But from the fork it had slipped. She tried to fish it up, and failing, looked at it as though it were some curious thing. It must have been curious, some highly charged slice, perhaps. The fork with which she was spearing at it gave little taps, not on it, but against the plate. Had you not known better, you would have said that the phenomenon was due, not to the orange, but to her; to some tremor, perhaps.

“I do not yet know,” Uxhill was saying, “just how I shall proceed. But, probably, in Rhode Island, where I was born, and where, technically I may, I think, still claim residence. In that event it won’t take long, and when I have it—”

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Stella was rising. Uxhill, too, stood up.

“When I have it—”

But, Stella now was passing into the adjoining room.

“When I have it,” he repeated, following and overtaking her there. “When I do—”

Turning suddenly, she confronted him.

“Don’t say it,” she cried. A hand, half raised, she held up in protection.

That hand he caught, and peering into her face, asked:

“Will you marry me when I have?”

The girl wrenched herself free. From her eyes flashed indignation, or was it disdain?

“In this very room, once and for all, did I forbid you to speak to me as you have.”

“I was married then.”

“You are still.”

“For a brief while only.”

## VANITY SQUARE

"You have no right to even mention the subject to me."

"I have the right that love gives."

"I deny it. I will not listen."

"But you must. And you shall. The first time I saw you, the mere movement of your head went to mine. Later, I saw you raise your arms. From them I could swear fell the reason of love. Later still, at this very spot, I told you of it. That, indeed, I lacked the right to do,—or so I thought, and determined never to repeat it. But fate had me in its charge. At that very moment it was preparing to empty this house. What brought you here but fate, and what but fate has brought you here again? You may deny what you like, you cannot deny the inevitable that has destined us for each other."

The speech, if tolerably rambling as such speeches are apt to be, had, how-

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ever, a moral to it, to emphasize which he caught again at her hand.

"Let me be."

Her head bent, her eyes avoiding his, she tried to free herself. But, the effort was less violent than before, and because her face was turned from him, the anger, the defiance, too, which previously she had displayed was less visible. No longer was she confronting him as she had with her air of divinity offended. Her ineffective struggle more clearly suggested girlhood, helpless and hurt.

"Look at me," he continued, his hand still fast on hers. "Tell me that when this is over I may come to you and ask you again."

"Let me go."

Struggling still, she was still trying to get her hand away.

"Yes, surely," he answered, "though if you would let me, I would leave you



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and go myself, until I could come and claim you. For claim you I shall. Only tell me that you will be waiting and willing. Tell me that. Tell me," he persisted. "Say it."

She had ceased to struggle. Her head now was not bent. She had raised it. She was looking at him. From her face the high disdain had gone. There was something else there. Something which must have eliminated the necessity for further speech,—something that did away with the need of questions, with the need, too, of other reply. At sight of it his arms went about her, and in them, her eyes in his, his lips on hers, unresistingly she lay.

A moment only. Undulently she freed herself, crossed the room, stopped at a mirror, adjusted her hat, got her coat, drew on her gloves.

"I shall see you?" Uxhill asked.

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Stella, occupied with a button, shook her head. Her face was hotly flushed, her fingers were unassured. To a girl who has not been kissed before, the process is emotional, though her mouth does not lose its freshness for that.

“You will write to me?”

Occupied still with a button, again she shook her head.

“But when it is over?”

She had finished now with her gloves. Silently but suddenly, with an abandonment for which even the kiss had not prepared him, her face still hotly flushed, the edges of her teeth just visible on her under lip, her eyelids quivering, emotionalized still, the hands that were in those gloves frankly she put in his.

It was her answer.

Over her hands he bent. She took them from him, moved to the hall beyond, and silently still, through doors that

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footmen held open, like a divinity disappearing in incense and prayers, out and away she passed.

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#### IV.

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THE poets are right. Life is packed with delights,—which the majority of us never enjoy. The world is filled with delightful people,—whom few of us ever meet. There is food for every hunger, drink for every thirst. There are amusements for the simple, austerities for the sage. But, of all things that the gods can bring,—and take,—love is best. In its ambrosia is a sense of Olympus.

Uxhill, the savor of it on his moustache, stalked up and down. He had not, in earlier days, written a sequence of sonnets for nothing, and now, in further sequences, he saw himself strolling with the lovely girl through lovely lands, beneath a sky of cinnabar, beside a sea of blue. And there, in gardens glowing in

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perpetual summer, in fevers of perpetual caresses, he could see her, her arms outstretched, fairer than dream could be.

The vision was so vivid that, naturally, it evoked others,—the perspectives he had intercepted with the ambrosia that had come to him from Maud. But, the parallel was disagreeable. In stalking up and down, he tried to leave it behind. But, it refused to be left. It ran after him. He could not get away from it. Then presently the Why, which he had thought safely ablated, eruptively returned.

Why had she gone? The reason might be a matter of indifference; nonetheless, it would be satisfactory to know. In the proceedings which he proposed to institute the rhyme of it would aid him in determining his terms. If, like Mrs. Besalul, she had gone with some man, then he would exact the custody of his

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child. He did not see with what man she could have gone, but episodes of his buccaneer days had taught him that when a woman's heart is interested, that heart may become a treasure-house of mystery and ruse.

At the same time he found himself forced to admit that in all the years of his life with Maud, not once, not for a second, had he known her other than straight as a string. No one becomes suddenly bad, he decided, precisely as he had already decided that no one becomes suddenly insane. Like madness, badness, too, has its degrees, the preliminary steps before the jumping-off place is reached. You must be mad in thought and bad in thought before you can be either in action.

Then, also, in conceit—very pardonable because perfectly human—he was quite unable to regard her as an unfaithful

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wife. Not merely did it clash with his idea of her, but it diminished him in his own esteem. Poets, buccaneers, mere men, object very much to that.

No ; any such explanation of her departure was, on the face of it, absurd. Yet, if it were not some other, it must be that. And what other could it be? Why should a woman who had a home that was at least to her liking, and a husband who was manifestly the same, spring abruptly from a sick-bed and abandon both, unless enthralled by some man?

Why, indeed? And there he was back again in the infernal circle of the query, with no other escape from it than the conviction that she was not of that kind. No ; she was not,—a fact, however, which had not prevented her from leaving him precisely as though she were. In the circumstances it seemed to him

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unendurable that he was not better informed. Thereupon, prompted by that stupid theory of what's what, which most men of his class have, he seriously assured himself that if, by any inconceivable chance, he had been tempted to act toward her as she had acted to him, he would have told her all about it in advance. For that, he reflected, would be only the gentlemanly thing to do, forgetting entirely, in so reflecting, that when a man does depart from a lady, he is either too exasperated, or, what is worse, too weary for further speech.

Yet, even had he recalled that platitudinous point, it would have brought him no nearer the mark. But, thus far, nothing had. From whatever angle he tried to approach it, he tumbled straight into the circle again, like a fly that crawls up a window-pane and then buzzes back.

Then, as such things occur, he thought



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of the letters in the hall. He had them brought to him, spread them out on the piano, and selecting one, bothered no further with what the others contained.

The letter which he selected was from Tatum. It held two enclosures, of which one was a memorandum of services rendered, the other a copy of a communication from Forster, the bishop's representative, stating that Messrs. Crumings & Kim, attorneys, 10 Wall Street, New York, had been authorized to accept service in any action instituted against Mrs. Gerald Uxhill by Gerald Uxhill, esquire.

That was all. But, was it not ample? Was it not insolent, also? Nothing more, and nothing less, than that he could go ahead if he liked, and, failing that, to the devil.

"Yes," Uxhill remarked to himself,

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“it is the height of *sans-gêne*, the *comble* of indifferent defiance.”

Yet, somehow, behind it, Maud herself, the Maud whom he had known, was absent. Then at once there returned the theory with which Sayce had comforted him,—the idea that she had become another being, an idea, however, which, on examination, divested itself of any comfort, for the reason that, admitting its validity, the confiscation of her to the profit of a secondary personality would be as obvious to those who were acting for her as his own trip to nowhere had been apparent to those that had tended him.

And there he was. But, the position, unendurable from the start, had now become absolutely untenable. He must, he saw, fight free from it, and fight at once.

Thereupon he wrote a note to Jones,

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asking him, if possible, to dine with him at eight that night.

The note dispatched, he discovered again how appallingly desolate was the house.

**I**N Vanity Square everybody is late for everything. At dinner only is some sort of decency observed, and then not always. Uxhill had known himself to be behindhand a whole hour, and, on one occasion—through an unholy mix and confusion of dates—a whole week, a degree of lateness so superlative that his hostess, instead of being put out, had regarded it as highly original.

Jones, though affiliated with the precinct and its peculiarities, was never late. He turned up with the punctuality of a comet. An eclipse was not more reliable. When expected at eight, at eight to the minute he appeared.

But there must always be exceptions. This evening was one of them. Eight

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came, but not Jones. Five minutes passed. Ten. The quarter after. Still no Jones. To Uxhill this was odd. In the note he had told him that if he could come, not to bother to reply. But, if he could not, to telephone. There had been no reply, no message whatever. There was but one conclusion. The note, sent to his residence, had not reached him, either because he was detained at his office or else—

Here, mentally, Uxhill stumbled over an alternative that suddenly loomed,—the possibility that Jones was the man !

For years he had seen him spreading before the feet of Maud the mantle of his admiration, inoffensively indeed, but quite as a courtier may to his queen. For years, too, he had seen Maud tread on that mantle as a queen should, with royal unconcern.

At the possibility that it could have

## VANITY SQUARE

enthralled her, Uxhill pulled at his moustache, gnawed at it. Here was a sequence of things which he had omitted to consider, and which now, in considering, produced for him the immediate resolution to kill the damned scoundrel if—

“Mr. Jones,” a voice announced.

Then at once before Uxhill the scoundrel appeared, his bandbox air rather absent. He had an overcoat on, the collar turned up, the coat itself very dirty. In his hand was his hat, singularly bedrabbled. He nodded at Uxhill and looked cautiously about.

“Where the devil have you been?” Uxhill, perplexed at the mummery, inquired.

“In a fight. Where is your wife?”

“H’m. She—er—she is not at home this evening. What the deuce do you mean by a fight?”

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He touched a bell. A footman appeared.

“Take Mr. Jones’ hat and coat.”

Then the reason of that coat became apparent. The shirt beneath was rumpled, the collar torn, the white tie hanging disreputably.

Nervously, at the spectacle, Uxhill laughed.

“I should say you had been in a fight.”

Jones laughed, too. “I have not had such fun in a week. On the corner below a hold-up man pointed a gun at me, and though I knocked it out of his hand, I had to knock him down several times before I could convince him that he had mistaken his party. I was glad of the exercise, but sorry to have mussed my shirt. Have some of your people take me where I can get a bit ship-shape.”

Uxhill, mollified now, had Jones, scoundrel no longer, taken to his dressing-

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room, from which presently, in a fresh shirt and a reputable tie, he reappeared almost as bandboxy as ever.

"I say, Patmore," said Uxhill, when, shortly, the two men sat down to dinner, "Mr. Jones has been held up at the corner. Get me a pistol to-morrow and keep it in my overcoat pocket."

"Yes, sir ; thank you, sir. New York is getting very bad, sir."

"Weren't there any police about?" Uxhill continued, turning to Jones.

During dinner the episode defrayed the conversation. But when the servants had gone, Jones, fingering a filbert, asked pointedly :

"What's wrong with you?"

"I had not meant to disturb your digestion and, possibly my own. by offering you horrors for dessert," Uxhill replied, "but—"

Thereat, Uxhill produced them ; Maud's



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tortuous flight, the Boston trip, the further journey, the communication from Crummings, with, for climax, the comfortless theory of Sayce.

"Gammon!" said Jones. It was his sole comment.

Uxhill nodded. "I never took much stock in that myself."

Jones lighted a cigar, slowly, carefully, meditatively. Then he, too, nodded. "There is something back of this—"

"Of course there is," Uxhill interrupted.

"Which you have not told me," Jones resumed. "Now, what is it?"

Uxhill flared. "I have told you everything,—everything, that is, which I consider relevant."

But Jones, who had come from one fight, was not to be denied in another. "Let's hear, then, what you don't consider relevant."

## VANITY SQUARE

“Well, for one thing, she says I am crazy, when it is perfectly patent that she is crazy herself.”

Jones nodded again. He was not yet where he wanted to be, but he was getting there.

“Better that than to say that you are stupid. Besides, a woman never says a man is crazy until he is one too many for her. But, don’t flatter yourself. That is not your case. Your wife has outwitted you,—which is precisely the reason why you call her crazy yourself. You are jealous of the way in which she has got ahead of you, and jealous people invariably call names. I don’t believe that she ever called you any.”

Still weak from the fatigues of the journey to nowhere and back, the snub bowled Uxhill over. But he was game and up at once.

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"If she is not crazy, she is worse, and there is the mystery for—"

"There is no such thing as mystery," Jones, dodging and landing another, broke in. "There is only ignorance, and with that you are abundantly supplied."

"It is not my fault, then," Uxhill, rather staggered, replied.

"No ; it's your wife's misfortune. She is not playing hide-and-go-seek for the fun of it, but in self-defence, at something you have done. Now, what is it?"

Then Uxhill got back at him. "I have done nothing. I have not had time. But, now I am going to do something. I am going to get a divorce. What is more, you are going to get it for me."

Jones put his hands down. "Ah!" he said, invitingly, "who is the lady? One of her intimate friends, I'll wager. And

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you pretend not to know why she has gone?"

"Lady!" Uxhill fiercely exclaimed. "What are you talking about? I have said nothing about any lady."

"Then what the devil do you want a divorce for? To be revenged? That is not very gentlemanly. To see your name in the papers? Without enjoying it very much, you have seen it there before. To recover Mowgy? But you would spoil her with concessions, and ruin her with chocolates. Unless you propose to marry somebody else, what good, then, will a divorce do you? But that's it. Nobody ever wanted a divorce for any other purpose. It was devised for that. Marriage is the earliest of institutions. Divorce was invented three weeks later. It is perfectly clear to me, and, if to me, how much more so must it have been to your wife?"

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“But,” Uxhill expostulated, “you—”

With a gesture Jones hushed him. “And you have called her crazy! Good God! It is considerate that she is, and, what is more, high-bred. On discovering your intentions, without a word, without a reproach, she leaves you, and leaves you to your conscience. That I call very fine. Always I have admired her, but never as now; and as for getting a divorce for you, frankly, Uxhill, I will see you damned first.”

“But, confound it!” the routed wretch, in utter exasperation, cried, “you have the cart before the horse. You jump at the conclusion I am to remarry. Supposing I am. I had no idea of it before she left, and, consequently, she could not have, either.”

“Oho! It is only since, then, that you have met Number Two? It seems to me that you have been devilish expeditious.”

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“Well,—er, no. I had met her before.”

“Where?”

“Here.”

“In this house?”

Uxhill nodded.

Jones nodded back. “That is just what I said. If Number Two is not an intimate friend of your wife, she at least has been her guest. What your wife saw I don’t know. No one ever does know what women see. They have eyes in the back of their head. But, without giving you the chance to suspect that she saw anything, she washes her hands of you both. I call that very fine. Now, whoever Number Two may be is immaterial. But, I submit that your wife is worth a hundred of her. The one decent course for you to pursue is to find her, go on your knees to her, and promise to mend your ways.”

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Jones' cigar had gone out. He put it down and got up.

"Apropos. How is Miss Sixmith? I suppose I may take it for granted that she is contemplating matrimony also?"

To the question, as well as to the remark, Uxhill, instead of replying, got behind them into what had gone before.

"I have nothing to go on my knees for," he said, and, as though to emphasize the statement, he also stood up. "Nothing. Maud had no more cause for leaving me than I had for leaving her. In spite of which, and rather precisely on that account, I did try to find her. I tried so hard that I lost myself. I shall not try again."

"But you will try for a divorce?"

"I certainly shall."

"Well, you took the wrong bull by the horns when you said you expected me to

## VANITY SQUARE

get it for you. By the way, what is your opinion of horsehair?"

"Horsehair!" Uxhill echoed blankly.

"Yes; not long ago I saw Nora in the street. I stopped and asked her about Mowgy. She told me she was all right again, adding that she herself had been attending to some horsehair. I could not quite congratulate her. My grandmother, who lived in Washington Square, made her house hideous to me with furniture covered with it."

From the dining-room, the two men had passed to the other. Jones gazed about at the harmony of its fittings.

"In addition to matrimony, you are not," he continued, "contemplating any such further atrocity, are you?"

"No," said Uxhill absently. He had hardly heard.

But Jones had had enough; he got into his coat and got away.



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## VI.

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ABOVE, on the ceiling, the cupids lounged and laughed. To them nothing whatever was of any importance. In their attitude was supreme philosophy. When Jones had gone, Uxhill stared at them, but unseeingly. The beauty of their significance was undiscerned. He was angry at the world, at himself, but, most, at Jones. A remark of the lawyer's, suggesting that he find Maud and go on his knees to her, rankled.

You don't rob a man and beat him, and then expect him to apologize, he told himself. Though, perhaps, lawyers do. Of course, though, he understood, Jones' admiration for Maud was so exalted that it put her on a pedestal which an earthquake could not shake. At the

## VANITY SQUARE

same time it was very tedious, for now he would have to get some else. But, whom? It was not that attorneys were lacking. The woods were full of them. Some had the theory of law, but not the practice; some knew the practice, but not the law; while the majority were profoundly ignorant of either. It was certainly very tedious.

In considering it, anger receded, as anger always does. In its place weariness came. From the debilitating effects of the journey to nowhere and back he had not yet fully recovered. Recognizing the fact, he ambled off to bed, which is always a very safe thing to do.

On the morrow he lunched at the Athenæum, afterward played bridge, and without bothering to return and dress, dined there, trying to feel that he was enjoying himself.

The effort was not successful. The

## VANITY SQUARE

solitude of his house accompanied him. The gloom of it mantled him like a disease. In the cards which he held he saw other faces than those which they portrayed. Sometimes Maud's, sometimes Stella's, sometimes both, sometimes so confusingly that he was in doubt who was Queen of Hearts.

In this confusion and the doubt of it, he succeeded very perfectly in making himself very agreeable. His money ran like a fox before the hounds. The men with whom he played had never suspected before what a thoroughly good chap he was. Incidentally, when over the true identity of the Queen of Hearts, the doubt came; always after it there trailed the memory of Maud's ruthless desertion; while, before him, surged a vision of Stella's starlike eyes. Then, although the doubt retreated, the money did not return.

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Those eyes were a godsend to the men that sat about. Stocks were abysmally low that winter, with every menace of going lower yet. No one knew where the subsidence would cease. The men who were not hurt felt that they were,—asking themselves were they going to the poor-house, and telling each other that they were already there,—questions and answers which Uxhill's cheques momentarily relieved, and which, gladly enough, he would have enlarged if only their multiplication could have relieved him.

Time, in which all things unfold, disunite, and reassemble, alone could do that. Meanwhile the sense of desolation in which he groped, and which, when noticed at all by those who sat about, was attributed to the preoccupations of play, instead of diminishing, so heightened that he felt he could stand it no longer, that he must see Stella, that the

## VANITY SQUARE

touch of her hand in his could alone dispel the gloom of the solitude which the presence of others only increased.

Uxhill had not an idea where the girl's lodgings were. But, Patmore must know, he reflected. Patmore had had charge of her things. He got the man on the telephone, and got, too, the address,—a street in the West Hundreds, to which at once, in a club motor, he went as fast as the motor could go, determining, in transit, that so would he prevail with her that thereafter, until the divorce was secured, she would consent to see him each day. It was damned nonsense, he told himself, that she should hold herself so aloof. Yet, in his heart, it was nonsense for which he admired her the more. Everything she had done or said, even to that, particularly to that, had made him see that she was one whom always he could wholly trust,—one whose mind was clean

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as wholesome fruit, one who, in respecting herself, compelled others to respect her, one who could never derogate from her own ideals,—a girl who could make a boor chivalrous, and the chivalrous bend the knee.

Nonetheless, he determined to prevail with her. Ordinarily, of course, he would not have attempted to. But he had the blues, and those blues she alone could cure. To others than lawyers, practice and theory are not the same.

In the present instance, however, it so fell about that they were forced to fuse. At the address in the West Hundreds, an address, Uxhill discovered, which resumed itself into a private hotel,—for young women only, and superselect young women at that,—there could be no prevailing, no resistance, either.

That morning Miss Sixsmith had gone to Canada, though whether to Montreal,

## VANITY SQUARE

Ottawa, or Quebec, she had temporarily omitted to state.

In circumstances such as these, to natures such as Uxhill's, a physician of the soul once offered the following very excellent prescription : *Lascia la donna e studia la matematica.*

Unconsciously, Uxhill rememorated it. Only for mathematics he substituted cards. The motor scurried him back to the green baize of the tables, where the money he got rid of was so profusely distributed that, when at last he left for his empty house, he was the most popular man in the club.

"What was it?" he asked himself in the cab that took him away ; "what was the name that Sayce gave to the malady which he said psychology recognized, and which consists in the fear of going home? Anyway," he decided, "I have it. Moreover, as Stella has so arranged things as

## VANITY SQUARE

to prevent me from seeing her until I have the divorce, I will start for Rhode Island to-morrow."

There are morrows that never dawn.



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## VII.

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THE next morning, Uxhill found himself inundated with the usual letters, which, as usual, he did not read. But, on one of them was an imprint that tempted. It was that of Crumings & Kim, the attorneys who had so civilly acquainted Tatum of their authority to accept service in any action against Mrs. Gerald Uxhill which Gerald Uxhill, esquire, might bring.

The present communication was equally civil. It set forth the perfectly legitimate wish of their client to recover her wardrobe, and suggested that, with Mr. Uxhill's permission and at Mr. Uxhill's convenience, packers would be sent.

In pauses of his perplexities, Uxhill had thought of this before. In ordinary circumstances, long since the things would

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have been shipped. If he had been unable to detain the lady, certainly he had no wish whatever to detain her clothes, or any of the thousand accessories that go to the making of a woman's atmosphere in her home. But, how may things be shipped to one who has no known address? The fact had affected him. It had seemed to him that Maud, in her flight, had taken only necessities, abandoning everything else; unwilling to be cumbered with objects associated with him. Whatever the cause of her going, he felt that he had not deserved that.

Then, too, there were Mowgy's toys, the little precious things which were hers, which she liked no one but herself to touch, but which occasionally, as a great treat, she displayed, one after another, admiringly to her papa. These things Uxhill knew that the child would miss, knew that their absence would hurt her

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with one of those hurts of childhood that are the more tragic in that they are inexplicable, and, as such, never forgot. What hurt her at all, hurt him far more.

Now, on receipt of the letter, he gnawed at his moustache. In view of the fact that, already, he had been officially acquainted with the existence and attributes of Crumings & Kim, it was for him to have offered to dispatch the things, instead of growling around like a dog in the manger, until prompted regarding a matter, of which, unprompted, he should have written himself. After all, it was but a detail. Yet, to the fastidious, details count.

There and then, Uxhill gave orders to have the things packed, and to Crumings & Kim he wrote a line setting forth that at any time the next day the effects would be delivered to anybody they might send. "Or," he was about to

## VANITY SQUARE

add, "to any address with which I am furnished."

But, that he judged superfluous. Crumings & Kim would furnish nothing. Yet, that which they would not furnish, he might obtain. There was nothing whatever to prevent him from having the things followed. Where they went, Maud would be, and Mowgy as well. No ; there was nothing to prevent him except his conceptions of what's what. An enterprise of that nature would, he reflected, be distinctly underhand. At the same time there was nothing particularly open and above board in the manner in which Maud had taken herself and his child away. Even so, the methods of other people cannot legitimize any lack of square-dealing in your own. Then, too, in love and war, women have not always the same high regard for what's what which they might. They are the weaker

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vessel, and must be treated as such. Moreover, and here was the main point, to which Uxhill in his cogitations reached at last: A gentleman never sees anything that was not intended for him.

As a result, he left the matter to take care of itself. But, for that day at least, he thought the journey to Rhode Island might as well be postponed. Then, the orders given, the letter dispatched, he got away into club-land, where he remained until night.

The morrow was more episodical. By the afternoon train he proposed to go to Newport. Long before that train had any intention of starting, the morning post brought him a note of legal thanks, saying that shortly an expressman would stop by for the effects.

With that the episodical day began.

A trifle before noon, Uxhill was in the hall. He had been helped into his coat.

## VANITY SQUARE

His hat had been handed him. A man held his stick, which, his gloves buttoned, he was about to take, when the bell rang and there was the expressman, a blond giant, producing an order for trunks.

Uxhill looked at it. "Where are you to take them?" he asked.

"To the Buckingham, sir."

"What! To the Buckingham, on Fifth Avenue?"

"Yes, sir."

The Buckingham was less than a mile away, practically around the corner, five minutes in a cab, ten on foot. Uxhill passed on and out. Beyond was Central Park, swooning in excesses of snow, striated with trees, from the branches of which icicles hung and glittered. Though the cold was polar, the sky was equatorially blue. The eager air, that slapped you with a smart that made your cheeks feel like porcelain, had in it little motes

## VANITY SQUARE

that dazzled. But, the exhilaration which the sheen of them induced, Uxhill at first did not notice.

He was occupied with a novelty which he had encountered in the pocket of his overcoat, the pistol which, on the spur of the moment, he had told Patmore to get for him, and then had utterly forgot. What earthly use had he for it? he asked himself. Hold-ups do not occur in the daytime, in Vanity Square at least, and, at night, not being as mad about exercise as Jones was, he was never on foot.

Then, precisely as he had forgotten that he told Patmore to put the thing in his pocket, he forgot that it was there. He had other matters on his mind. The fact that Maud was within hailing distance routed everything else. The sheer simplicity of it bewildered. There were times when he fancied her in Mexico, others when he believed she might be on

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the Mediterranean, but always nebulously in some spot which he never could find, and to which he never would know why she had gone.

Instead of which, she was around the corner, the toss of a stone from the Athenæum Club. But, though the simplicity of that was startling, yet, he reflected, it coincided curiously with her entire *sans-gêne*. Quite as her attorneys had made it clear that it was immaterial to her whether he brought suit, or whether he did not, so, obviously, it was one to her whether or not he chanced on her in the street.

Only, Uxhill told himself, the obvious is misleading. It was all too damned obvious to be other than phantasmagoric. For what in the world was there to prevent him from marching to her rooms, marching in, and marching Mowgy away? It was absurd on the face of it. She



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could not be at the Buckingham. Probably Crumings lodged there, or Kim, and one or the other of them had the trunks fetched to the hotel for subsequent transshipment.

In Uxhill's brisk descent of the Avenue, already the Park and its excesses of snow had been left behind. The Plaza, too, he had passed. Before him the Cathedral tossed, like cries, its spires in the biting air. The brick and brown of the Buckingham were just beyond. In a moment he would know.

In a moment he did. Entering the hotel, he went to the desk and asked if Mrs. Uxhill was in, producing a card on which the clerk scribbled a number, gave it to a bell-boy, and told him he would see.

Maud was there, then. In a crescendo of bewilderment he turned away, contemplating with unseeing eyes piles of

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papers and magazines which another desk contained,—a contemplation which the bell-boy interrupted.

The party was out.

Well, why not? Uxhill reflected. It might be so. He could, of course, sit about and wait. He could also go away and return, demand access to Mowgy, and, the demand denied, apply for a habeas corpus.

At the thought of all that he felt extraordinarily hot, and, unbuttoning his overcoat, strode out into the eager air. It nipped him. He meditated an immediate descent on some one of the many lawyers that he knew, and mapped an instant campaign. But, in the refreshment of the air, he concluded that the telephone might spare him any such bother, and, besides, in the present and surprising condition of things, it were, perhaps, better to see if he could not

## VANITY SQUARE

get Jones to learn for him the lay of the land.

Then presently he reached the club, where latterly he had become so popular. At the time it was empty. In the reading-room, before an open fire, two old men were comparing ailments. Otherwise there was no one. Uxhill got out of his coat, went to the telephone-room, told the operator to call Jones, and, at once almost, he was talking to him, telling him that Maud was at the Buckingham, asking him to go to her, and to insist that, without forcing him to uncivil proceedings, she give up the child.

"And herself, too, of course," Jones replied.

"You may say, if you like, that I have but one desire regarding her, and that is never to see her again."

"I'll be shot if I do!" Jones shouted back. "I will carry no such message.

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But, your child is a different matter. I will see about that. Where are you?"

"At the Athenæum."

"Stay there, then, until you hear from me."

It was then one by the clock. It would, Uxhill knew, be at least an hour before he could possibly hear. He joined the old men. But, their complaints failed to interest him very deeply. The haunting query had returned. Yet, not as before. The enigma of the great Why was as mysterious as ever, but the solution over which he had puzzled had lost its disturbing force. It could no longer change the course of events. He had been shamelessly treated, and though an explanation of that treatment might possibly be forthcoming, yet for it there could never be the slightest excuse. While one old man was telling of his lumbago, and another of his gout, such were Uxhill's thoughts.

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Pretexting a pretext, he left them and ordered lunch. In spite of the walk, the eager air and the bite of it, he was not very hungry that day. He wished to the devil it were all over. He wished that he and that lovely girl were sailing away to some lovely shore, where, in a fever of perpetual caresses, perpetual summer would be theirs. He thought of Bora Bora. But he put it from him. It was too much of a job to get there.

Zante occurred to him, the *isola d'oro*, the hyacinthine isle, where the slopes and intervalles are rose when they are not purple, where the sky is a stretch of silk wadded with films of pink cotton, where there is no violet deeper than the velvet of its nights, where the air, a bath of gold, is shuttled with the color of dreams, with dreams changing colors,—with salmon, saffron, and smalt.

In the beauty of it all, Stella would fit

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like a flower of flesh, and at sight of her the grave Ionians would stop, and, musing, wonder could the young Venus of their ancient faith again from the sacred sea have arisen.

It was a delightful picture. It needed only the accompaniment of a little music to be perfect. Having intercepted it, and, incidentally, having eaten a suprême of chicken with a big bit of pistache in the middle, Uxhill lit a cigar, long, thin and black, at the end of which those casements formed that open on the marvel of lands where dreams come true, and then, it may be, occasionally turn into nightmare. On the fair perspectives Uxhill gazed until a head-waiter, approaching, arranged a chair for Mr. Yoda Jones.

Uxhill started. But, then, he had been far away. He looked at Jones, then at his watch. It was just three. Such were the imaginary enchantments which the

## VANITY SQUARE

imaginary casement disclosed that time had passed unnoticed. He had fancied it much earlier and said as much,—a remark which Jones treated like a cobweb.

Seating himself and addressing Uxhill without the faintest exhibition of any one of the many bagatelles of the intercourse known as courteous, “You can,” he announced, “see your child whenever you get ready. It is your right, in the first place; moreover, it is one that nobody proposes to contest. But”—and Jones, as he threw out the monosyllable, gave Uxhill a look that was tantamount to a blow—, “take the child away and it is murder.”

“What?”

“You understand English, I believe?” Jones, poking his head out like a turtle, inquired. “Yes. Well, I said murder. M-u-r-d-e-r! Did you get it? You will

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kill your wife,—that's what you'll do ; confound you."

"But, see here !" Uxhill furiously interjected ; "hold on a minute. What the devil are you driving at ? What did she say ?"

"I have told you," Jones curtly, with his most brutal air, replied.

"You have not told me why she left me."

"I have that. I told you before I saw her. She left because of your matrimonial intentions."

"But, confound it, at the time I had none. The idea had not entered my head. How could it have ?"

"Perhaps," said Jones, "you had it subconsciously and talked of it in your sleep. How do I know what you did, or what you did not ?" he angrily resumed. "I asked your wife if she cared to tell me her reason. She answered that when



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you were free, you would marry Miss Sixmith."

At that, Uxhill, who had been leaning on the table, staring at Jones, sank back in his chair.

"God alone knows where she got that. The only people who knew are Miss Sixmith and myself. Certainly she did not get it from me, and she could not have got it from Miss Sixmith. Miss Sixmith knew no more than I did where she was."

"On the contrary, Miss Sixmith knew very well where she was. She knew that she was in bed,—ill there."

"But, confound it, can't you or won't you understand that at that time I had not asked Miss Sixmith to marry me?"

"Oh, I hardly suppose that in so many words you made a formal proposition that she should accord you her hand in holy matrimony. But, that she was

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aware of your intentions is clear from the fact that your wife was also."

Uxhill pulled at his moustache. The obstinate stupidity of Jones irritated him so that he could have struck him. But, in the clubdom of Vanity Square, a relapse into such primal primitiveness does not do.

"I tell you," he angrily repeated, "that I had no such intentions. Miss Sixmith could not have been aware of them, or Maud, either. But, let it go. Was that her reason for leaving?"

"I hardly see what better reason she or any other woman could have. When I asked her she said at once that you proposed to marry again, and, as you had admitted it, I could not deny it. It was then that she said she would not contest any action; on the contrary, that she would facilitate you; but, she told me to beg you to leave her the child. I felt it my duty

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to say that if, instead of facilitating you, she resisted any action you brought, and showed how you had been carrying on under her nose, it was she who would get the decree and the child as well."

"I was not carrying on under her nose," Uxhill ragingly retorted; "it is an outrage for you to suggest it."

"When I told her that," Jones imperturbably pursued, "she replied that she would not contend with you, but that if you took the child, you would take her life with it. Now, Uxhill—"

"Yes, I know, you want me to be lenient with a woman who drove me nearly if not quite insane, who for no reason whatever, for none, I tell you, for there was none, left me, abducted my child and went to her father."

"From whom, by the way, you abducted her, and who, when she sought refuge with

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him, told her that she had made her bed, and that she could lie on it. After taking her from her home, you have forced her from yours. She has nowhere to go. Only her child has she left to her, and you want to take that. You have ruined her life. But ruin is not enough for you. You want to kill her as well. Were it not for the child she would be glad to have you, glad to go, glad to be dead. And it is you who have brought her to that. But, you have been able to only because she loved you. It is a fine reward. I told her so. Yes, and she would not listen to me. She would listen to nothing against you. Uxhill, do you hear what I am saying? She stopped me when I started to tell her what I thought of you. Well, at any rate, I have told you. I should have suffocated if I had not."

Jones turned, and, with an uplift of the

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chin, summoned a waiter. "Fetch me a whiskey and soda."

Uxhill turned also. He felt profoundly misused. Prior to Maud's exit, save for one brief mood that had departed as abruptly as it had come, save that and an equally brief passage-at-arms, there had been nothing in his conduct to which a saint could object, there had been nothing on his conscience which a seraph would reprove. He felt that. He felt it so strongly that he felt that everybody concerned ought to feel it, too. Instead of which, through some unaccountable shuffle of the cards, one that he could no more explain to himself than he could explain Maud's exit, he who had done nothing, and to whom everything had been done, suddenly, through this prodigious shuffle, was turned into a villain in a melodrama, feeding on women's tears. He was guiltless, yet held guilty, while the

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real criminal was converted into a suffering angel before his eyes.

Strangling an oath, he stared at Jones, who, having had his say, was refreshing himself with a great glass of bubbling stuff that had effected its entrance with a pop !

At other tables other men were lunching belatedly. Without, in the hall, others were entering a room where Uxhill's money had run like a fox. From without came the jingle of sleigh-bells, the cries of brutes swearing at their horses, the sound of hammering and of engines working at the ceaseless skyscrapers ceaselessly going up, the metallic roar of the city.

Of it all, Uxhill was unconscious. One fact alone stood out. He was inexplicably misused. Jones, through some impediment of thought, was not only incompetent to see things as they were,

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but now, after having damned him up hill and down, was affecting, if you please, a remoteness that seemed to say, you are not fit to be spoken to.

Thereat, as though to put an accent on this impression, Jones, the bubbling stuff absorbed, stood up, and, without as much as a nod, marched off.

But, that was the extra drop. Uxhill felt not merely misused, but robbed. Jones was taking away with him the opportunity of being told what a confounded ass he was ; what a confounded ass he had always thought him,—a confounded ass, indeed, with whose asininity he wished nothing further to do.

That robbery was more than Uxhill could bear. He started from his seat. But, in the hall, in which Jones' retreating back was still discernible, were men with whom Uxhill was very popular ; a group of them detained him, asking were he not

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to join them, urging him to come and play. When he was free of them, Jones, like a fiend on the stage disappearing in a trap, had entered a lift and vanished.

When, ultimately, Uxhill reached the hall below, the doorman told him that Mr. Jones had just gone.

Maltreated, misused, robbed-to-boot, Uxhill became immediately conscious of a sense of being absolutely alone. The colossal city had been converted suddenly into a desert, in which, Stella gone, there was not a soul with whom he cared to exchange a word.

No ; not one. Only a little girl, too young to understand.



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## VIII.

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CHILDREN do not consider the future, they do not bother over the past ; to them the present is alone important. We have much to learn of children. Apart from the charm of their charming philosophy, they are anarchists every one. They all wish to do what pleases them,—and what wish is more natural? Sometimes their wish is realized ; then, instead of being anarchists, they are autocrats ; for, when you come to look at it, an anarchist merely wants to do that which an autocrat can.

To Uxhill, Mowgy was an autocrat. He never thought of thwarting her. Now, the memory of her recurring, he got from the club, and made for the hotel.

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At the desk orders evidently had been received. There was no sending of cards or waiting about; a bell-boy, directed at once what to do, led him to a dim hall and to a door, where he knocked.

But, Uxhill, unaccustomed to such formalities, opened it and beheld a room, at one end of which Nora stood, looking extremely uncomfortable, while, on the floor, was Mowgy.

The child turned, distended her mouth immeasurably, got precipitately to her little feet, with a bleat of joy hurled herself in his arms, and then, after the fashion of children who invariably persecute those that love them, she proceeded to tyrannize.

“Take me home,” she ordered.

At the side of the room a lateral door, behind which he divined the presence of Maud, silently was closing.

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Uxhill kissed the little girl. "Yes, dear, presently."

"No ; now," the child insisted.

But at the door through which he had come there was fresh knocking. A waiter appeared with bread and butter and strawberry jam, which Nora took from him.

"You must eat your supper first," said Uxhill, striving not to thwart but to temporize. "We will talk about it afterward." He turned to the nurse. "Nora," he added, "you need not wait."

Nora, who, at the moment, was arranging the child's supper, looked if possible still more uncomfortable. She glanced at Uxhill, but gingerly, out of the corner of an eye, instantly averted. But, presently, through the lateral door, with another furtive look, she departed.

Uxhill, occupied with Mowgy, did not

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notice. He got a chair and seated himself beside her.

"Now, tell me all about where you have been."

Mowgy was a small person much given to routine. Heretofore, at supper, there had been stories. What heretofore had been must therefore be now. Besides, what were papas for except to entertain little girls? After a long, leisurely bite at her bread, she made that point very clear. Uxhill knew that it was idle to argue. Like water from a faucet, he poured a story forth. When it was done she exacted another. Then, the jam finished, her hunger for food and fiction appeased, she got back to her original demand.

Again Uxhill had to temporize. He told her that it was getting late, that presently all good little girls would be in bed, that only papas who were very big and very strong ever thought of being

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out at such an hour, but that, perhaps, the next day, he would come for her and Nora.

“And mamma, too, of course,” said Mowgy, to whom the oversight was an accident, and to whom also the objections appealed.

“Now, you run to her,” Uxhill replied ; “but say good-night to me first.”

The child did as she was bid. Patting him on the cheek, she said good-night, and going to the door that led to the adjoining room, kissed her hand to him as she opened it.

Uxhill went out into the hall. Beyond, a woman was loitering, a maid, he thought, but who, as he approached, he saw was Nora. She was holding her hands, in an attitude respectful and shrinking.

“Mr. Uxhill, sir,” she began, “you won’t take Mowgy, will you?”

“Not to-night ; certainly not.”

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“Not to Miss Sixmith, sir?”

Uxhill had spoken, as he went on, without stopping, over his shoulder. At this he stopped short.

“But what,” he curtly inquired, “has Miss Sixmith got to do with it?”

“Oh, sir, excuse me, sir; but I have been with Miss Maud, with Mrs. Uxhill, I mean, sir, since she was a little baby, and I am afraid, sir—”

Surprisedly Uxhill stared at the woman. She seemed afflicted with ague. She was trembling, and a handkerchief, which nervously she had been tormenting in her hands, she put to her eyes.

“Afraid!” he exclaimed, “afraid of what?”

But now Nora, covering her face with her handkerchief, sobbed merely.

“Afraid of what?” he repeated. What the dickens ailed the woman, he wondered.

“You—you know, sir,” she whimpered.

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"But, hang it, I don't know; what in the world are you crying about?"

"It's the—it's the—it's the horsehair. Oh!"

"Horsehair!"

But, Nora, the handkerchief still at her face, was slinking away. She reached the door from which he had come. It engulfed her.

"Horsehair!" Uxhill, following her with his eyes, reiterated. "She's cracked."

"Horsehair," he resumed to himself, as without bothering to wait for the lift, he went down the stairs; "who was it spoke to me about horsehair?"

He had forgotten. It was, perhaps, some club stupidity garnered at cards. But, horsehair is a thing too unsuggestive to be discussed even by people who talk about nothing. The fact perplexed him. But what perplexed him most was Nora.

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For years he had seen her tending Maud and Mowgy with a sort of slavish devotion, yet otherwise prim, angular, rigid, respectability personified, trustworthiness made nurse, the ideal servant, and now suddenly afraid of her shadow.

"Certainly she is cracked," he decided. "They are all cracked. Nora, Maud, Jones, the whole lot of them ought to be in Bloomingdale!"

At the thought of Jones, the recollection of the manner in which he had carried on that afternoon, ousted Nora and her craziness. Except on the theory that Jones was so dead in love with Maud that nothing she could possibly do would seem to him other than celestial, and anything, no matter how justified, done her, would seem to him distinctly infernal, except on that theory, Uxhill could conjecture nothing that would serve at all to explain the



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rhyme and reason of his attitude that day.

But, he suddenly queried, did it not explain more? Did it not explain the whole situation? Did it not explain Maud's exit, which, in forcing him to get a divorce, left her free to marry this imbecile? In explaining that, it explained, too, Jones' obstinacy in maintaining that Maud had left him because of what he was pleased to term his matrimonial intentions. That, of course, was all damned nonsense; Maud never could have left him for any such reason. At the time she went he had no intentions at all. The intentions had come later. He had admitted that to Jones. Jones had repeated the admission to Maud, and between them, as an excuse for her desertion, they had concocted this cock-and-bull story. It was all clear as day, and showed, too, why Jones had refused

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to act for him. Of course, the scoundrel would not act for him,—he proposed to act for her! It was a conspiracy, that's what it was,—a dirty, diabolic plot.

Long since, Uxhill had reached the street. Cold as it was, the aspects of the tortuous situation made him far hotter than he had been when he had stalked from the hotel earlier in the day. In his excitement he had passed the Athenæum. He turned back and entered the club on the heels of a man muffled to the ears, who greeted him warmly, with affectionate solicitude. It was Sayce.

The club now was crowded. In a great room that looked on Fifth Avenue were thick groups. In the main hall there were more. Through coils of men, servants in livery passed with diminutive decanters, with mineral waters, cocktails, cigars.

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Sayce unmuffling himself had the mufflings taken away.

Uxhill, too, got out of his coat. "Are you to dine here?" he asked. Without waiting to learn, he added, "Let's go upstairs. I must speak to you."

Already men were approaching. Among others the old man who had told Uxhill about his gout that noon. But, Sayce, knowing from experience what to expect, eluded him, and, followed by Uxhill, fled to a lift that shot them out of reach, landing them on a floor on which was the library, a room to which nobody ever went unless, the diminutive decanters urging, occasionally a member dropped in on the slumberous armchairs that were there.

Now it was peopled only with the caryatides of the bookshelves, the demi-gods that never die, but who, in a club like this, get dusty. Barring the

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bedrabbled immortals, the room was empty.

Sayce, letting himself on a sofa, looked at Uxhill.

“Any news?”

“What do you think?” Uxhill replied, squatting in a neighborly three-cornered chair as he spoke. “My wife and child are at the Buckingham. I have just come from there. I saw the kid, and see now the whole thing. The other night I spoke to Jones about getting a divorce. He came here to-day and abused me like a pickpocket. Why? Why, indeed! Because, after the divorce, he proposes to marry the lady.”

Sayce ran a hand through his hair and stared surprisedly. He was not surprised in the least. From the start he had suspected something of the sort, only he had been far too civil to intimate it.

“But, dear boy, did Jones say so?”

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“No, ruffian that he is, he lacked the pluck, but—”

Sayce nodded. “He has certainly always admired her very much. But so have I. So has everybody. Mrs. Uxhill is one in a million. It hardly follows, though, that—”

Uxhill interrupted him. “I, too, thought her one in a million, one in a billion, for that matter. That, though, is neither here nor there. The point is that Nora is stark, staring mad, and I want you, if you will, please, to look her over and pack her off. Mowgy is not safe with her ; she can’t be—”

“Nora !” Sayce exclaimed. “I won’t say it is not possible, for everything is, but—”

“Yes, I know. But, wait a second. Not ten minutes ago, with tears in her eyes, shaking from head to foot, she told me that she was afraid of—what do you

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suppose? Horsehair! Not a horsewhip, but horsehair. Why should anyone be afraid of that? And crying and sobbing over it, too. Isn't that enough? Isn't it clear that she is cracked? By George, I believe they all are."

"Hold up a bit," Sayce threw in. "How did it come about? What was it in connection with?"

"In connection with Mowgy. She said she was afraid of horsehair for her. Horsehair, now! There is nothing evil about horsehair, is there?"

Sayce tormented an eyebrow. "Horsehair *per se*, no. On the contrary, it is the outside of a horse, and that, Palmerston said, is the best thing for the inside of a man. But, he did not mean when taken internally. Then it might be unpleasant."

"But, whoever would think of taking it internally?"

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"Nobody with any sense, of course. But in medico-legal lore there is a mythical case in which a person, without sense and without scruples either, administered it feloniously. The effort was unsuccessful. But, the story got about, got twisted, as all stories do, and, in the legend, which still survives, the victim died."

"I never heard of such rubbish."

"There is nothing curious in that. What is curious is the fact that Nora should have. I don't understand it, and what I don't understand, I don't like."

"Nor I," said Uxhill. "Who does?" Suddenly he started. "There," he exclaimed, "I have it! Somebody else has talked horsehair to me. I had forgotten whom. Like that, it just came to me! It was Jones. He asked me what I thought about it?"

"About horsehair?" Sayce repeated

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gravely. Then he, too, abruptly started. Something forgotten must as suddenly have occurred to him. For a moment, his face, not grave merely but perplexed, he sat in silence.

"What do you make of it?" Uxhill asked.

"Do you know," Sayce answered, rising as he spoke, "I believe I will go and see Nora. I believe I will go now. Will you wait here?"

"I will order dinner. What would you like?"

"A bit of beef and a baked apple."

"Not together!" Uxhill called after him.

But Sayce had gone.

Uxhill rang, got the dinner-bill for the day, wrote a list of dishes, among which beef and apple were presumably included, and, going to the shelves, took down a dusty immortal, one at whose shrine



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often, in younger days, he had paused, and read again the verse of Leconte de Lisle, the royal "Midi," the prodigious "Vision de Brahma," the enchanting "Sommeil de Leïlah."

Twice a servant came, telling him that dinner was announced, but he did not heed. In the opiates of the evocations he forgot Sayce, forgot himself, and so forgetting, forgot, too, his little human soap-bubble loves and hates.

But a third summons awoke him.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"After nine, sir."

"After nine?" It seemed incredible. Sayce had been gone since seven. Usually he looked a patient over and in five minutes, Good-day. Uxhill wondered what possibly could be detaining him.

"I wish, please," he ordered, "that you get the doorman to send into the Buck-

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ingham and inquire of Dr. Sayce when he will be back. Dr. Sayce is with Mrs. Uxhill."

He turned again to the drugs in the book, to the "Dies iræ,"—the sorcery of a somnambulist of song. It lulled him.

In the process the servant returned.

"Dr. Sayce, sir, left the Buckingham some time ago. Yes, sir."

"But, didn't he come back here? He must be in the club."

"No, sir; the doorman says not, sir."

Perplexed, Uxhill got up. He did not at all understand. But then latterly a number of things had managed to elude his comprehension. This was but another.

With the idea that he might get the physician's secretary on the wire, he went down to the telephone-room and told the operator to call Dr. Sayce. When presently, in a little booth which the man

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indicated, he took up the receiver, he found that at the other end of it was Sayce himself.

“Hello!” he exclaimed. “What the dickens is the matter? I thought you were coming back.”

Then through the instrument came the physician’s answering voice:

“Uxhill, it is not for me to condemn anyone; but to you I intend never to speak again.”

“Sayce!” Uxhill protested.

The cry lost itself. At the other end connection had been cut.

In the booth was but a stool, on which Uxhill sat, a ledge on which the telephone stood with a blank wall behind it, into the blankness of which he stared.

Was the whole world mad? he wondered, or was he?

With such queries for companions, dazed and a bit dizzy, he sat. The

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desertion of Maud had been to him unfathomable. The ruffianism of Jones had been relatively just as strange. But, more inexplicable than either was this slap in the face. An hour or two before, in the hall without, a man who had greeted him with solicitude and affection now refused, indeed, to condemn him, and refused to speak to him as well. No; that man would not condemn him. Yet, condemn him for what? For what? Nor would he speak to him either. And why?

“Why?” he repeated to the wall. But the wall was not responsive.

Could it be that he was really mad, and that these things were hallucinations? But to this, also, the wall, like the telephone, was dumb.

That evening he had hit, or, what amounted to the same thing, thought he had hit, on a theory that explained, more or less well, everything that had occurred.

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But, in this new affront, any validity the theory may have had took itself off with a run. For admitting a conspiracy, certainly Sayce was not in it, yet his attitude was quite, if not more, unaccountable than the attitude of those that were. Evidently, if he himself was not mad, and evidently he was not, then there was something else. But what? Though he tormented himself into madness in an effort to learn, he knew that he would never succeed. Had Patmore refused to serve him or the chef torn his apron off, he would have thought merely that the air of free America had gone to their heads and let it go at that. But that Sayce should turn on him,—no, that, he decided, was something which he had awaited as little as that Mowgy should do so herself.

And who knows, the poor devil reflected, but that to-morrow she may?

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Who knows, he added in the miserable undertone of miserable thought, but that Stella will catch the infection and turn from me, too?

For it was an infection. What else could it be? First, Maud, then Jones, now Sayce. It was but a question of time when his sister would catch it, and everybody would go, everybody down to and including Patmore and the chef. Yet, if it were not an infection, then, in some strange and subtle way, he had become as one accursed, one who, for some sin unknown to him, those for whom he cared shrank from and shunned.

“Are you using the 'phone, sir?”

At the door of the booth the operator stood, eyeing him curiously. In that booth he had seen many men talking to the instrument, but none ever to themselves. He did not regard it as legitimate.

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“ Oh !” said Uxhill. Then, rallying, he added, “ They appear to have cut me off.”

With his usual indifferent air, he got out, got his coat, got a cab and drove to that house of his that was haunted now, and perhaps forever, with the ghosts of the living,—with the memories of those who had known him and would know him no more.

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## IX.

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SNOW was falling steadily in small, slow flakes. Uxhill did not notice. When a man speaks to another as Sayce had to him, the first aid for the injured Dante supplies: "*Non ragionam di lor' ma guarda e passa.*"

To Uxhill, mere human, natural pride counselled the adoption of that very excellent advice. But, pride is a screen behind which we rage at our ease. There are occasions when it is much braver to dare to be simple. The reason of the affront was wholly unimaginable. Behind it, too, were possible vastnesses in which imagination might readily weary itself uselessly away, the great blank voids of the inscrutable, where thought either falters or else, returning, saddens us with its hopeless mien.



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Pride, natural and human, counselled Uxhill to have no further heed of Sayce, to proceed without argument on his way. But, the equally human and natural desire to know, which, unappeased, may gnaw more sharply than hunger, fastened on him so irresistibly that, lowering the window of the cab, he threw at the driver Sayce's address.

The cab veered, turned into a side street, where presently it stopped.

Uxhill got out. Before him was a brown door, through which again and again he had passed, and at which, shortly now, a maid appeared, who, before he could question, told him that Dr. Sayce was not in. She might as well have held her tongue.

Uxhill, with that peremptoriness which was usual to him, strode by her, strode down the hall to another door, which, without the formality of a knock, he

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threw open and saw, before an open fire, beneath a big chandelier and behind a small table at which were two chairs, Sayce, standing bolt upright, looking remarkably red.

At the sight of Uxhill he stamped a foot. If a face can flame his did. If eyes could kill his would have.

"I am not at home!" he bawled.

"Not to me, I am aware. Your servant has so informed me. But why?"

"Because I am out. Is not that enough? What more do you want?"

Uxhill nodded. "Yes. But you owe it, not necessarily to me, but certainly to yourself, to say why. I have done nothing to deserve it."

Furiously through his hair, Sayce ran a hand.

"Nothing! Nothing! Then tell me what something is? Or, rather, don't tell me. I don't want to hear. I refuse to

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listen. Leave my house. You tarnish it."

Uxhill, closing the door behind him, toweringly advanced on the fiery little man.

"For that, were you a bit younger and a bit bigger, I would knock you down. You know it. It is your advantage. It is one, though, that a gentleman would not take. Don't do so again. I am here for an explanation. I propose to have it. But, meanwhile, in spite of your years, I will thrash you if you presume again on my forbearance."

"Thrash me!" Sayce shouted, his face livid, one arm half raised, the other shaking at his side. "If I had a pistol here I would give you the bullet you deserve."

"Ah, indeed!" Uxhill answered, negligently producing the novelty which that morning he had found in his pocket. "Well, now, here is one. It will enable

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us to talk on equal terms. I thank you for reminding me of it."

Sayce glared and dropped into one of the chairs by the table at which he stood.

On that table Uxhill put the pistol, shoving it over to where Sayce was, and, removing his hat, took the other chair and sat down.

But, at this, Sayce got up, turned his back on Uxhill, took a poker and lunged viciously at the fire. It was not redder than he.

The bent back before him Uxhill addressed.

"Will you tell me now in what way I have been so unfortunate as to offend you?"

Sayce, the poker still in his hand, wheeled like a rat.

"Offend me! Your language is singularly colorless. Offend me! The one thing in life I cared for you have taken.

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No wonder your wife had to go,—while she still had the strength. Such things are not done, not by Apaches even. Never for an instant would I have let that girl within a mile of you could I have conceived what you would do.”

Sayce paused, yet only for lack of breath. But, Uxhill, who, in mounting amazement, had disentangled from the unrolled skein of words an inkling of what he meant, sprang to his feet.

“But, Sayce, I never knew that you cared for her. You did not say, nor did she. Not for a moment did it occur to me—”

“Why should I have said anything? Besides, it is your wife that should have occurred to you. Your wife who—”

Hotly Uxhill interrupted him. “I assure you that not until my wife had gone did I say a word to Miss Sixmith.”

“Oh, you don’t have to assure me of

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that. If you had, she is not the girl to have listened. The marvel of it is that even afterward, when your wife had gone, she consented. But she little knew that your wife had to go,—while she could.”

“While she could!” Uxhill repeated.

“Yes, while she had the strength. It was infernal, the whole of it, even to your acting, even to your surprise when she had gone, even to your idea that you did not exist. Where did that come from except from the fact that were this thing known you would cease to?”

“Thing! What thing? What on earth—”

“Yes, infernal!” Sayce, brandishing the poker, shouted. “And in spite of it, you have the assurance to force your way here and to tell me not to presume on your forbearance. Yours, indeed! Don’t presume on mine. There is your pistol. Take it. Go home and shoot yourself.”

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The chiding of a torrent is futile. There are torrents of passion which words are as useless to stem. They must exhaust themselves before speech may prevail. The rabid denunciation of himself at which Uxhill was forced to assist was wholly incomprehensible. One dim point alone was dimly clear, the man's undivined infatuation for the girl who was dear, too, to him. The rest was thick darkness.

"Yes, go," Sayce cried, his great eyebrows raised and contracted, the poker hanging in his hand. "You came for an explanation. You have had it. You have had more than you asked. You have had two. Take them and be off, take the pistol also, or, if that is too much for you, take your infernal drug."

Uxhill, the thick darkness grown thicker about him, managed here with contrasting composure to interrupt again.

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“But, Sayce, what are you talking about? To what drug do you refer? To the opiate you gave me? Why should I take that? Might it not be better if you took some yourself?”

Sullenly, Sayce looked at him, and, bending, hissed, “You know the drug I mean, one of which the final effect may be delayed at will for weeks, for months, during which it simulates an ordinary disease, and, the more infernally, in that its absorption removes it beyond the chance of detection. That is the drug I mean, and which in your hands failed only because Nora was one too many for you; because she secreted enough for analysis and learned that it was orsere, horsehair as she got it, the most subtle poison known, and with which you were dosing your wife,—and why? Because a girl existed who would not listen to a married man. Because that man’s wife



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eliminated and perhaps the girl might !  
That was your infernal plot !”

At this fresh freshet of words, Uxhill again assisted, but now as one does at the sight of monsters emerging in nightmare, monsters that come, grimace, evaporate, instantly replaced by others more monstrous still. Uxhill could not stay them, he could not hide from them, he could not even cry out. He was dumb, only, unfortunately not deaf. But the darkness was less thick.

“Yes, that was your plot. Jones, whom I saw, told me about the girl ; Nora about the drug.”

“Told you ?” said Uxhill mechanically.

The monsters were still about him. But dawn was breaking. Dream may be numbing in horror, but sometimes the actual is worse. Before Uxhill a dream was receding. In its place was the real.

“She told you ?” he repeated in the

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same absent, mechanical way, occupied not with Nora, but the real. Yet, in his eyes and face so expressive must the real have been, that at some apperception of it suddenly taking shape, Sayce coerced, stepped back.

The doctors disagree. Some deny telepathy. Others declare that thoughts may be transmitted without signs, apparatus, or words, through the sheer impact of their force.

Perhaps they may. But this, at least, is certain. Something in Uxhill's eyes and face passed from him to Sayce. From his hand the poker fell, noisily, with a thud. Affrightedly he started.

"No, no ; not that !"

His hands had gone to his head. He seemed to be pressing at what had got there.

"No, no ; she never did. Oh, Uxhill," he called. "A girl like that ! You don't

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know her. She could not. Don't you see that she could not? Why should she? Don't you see that she had no reason at all?"

But, here a very curious thing happened. Sayce seemed to lose control of his legs. He had been standing, monologuing abjectly at Uxhill. Now, however, without falling or any effort to save himself, but precisely as though his legs had melted under him, he sank to the floor.

If Uxhill saw, he did not heed. Something else that had fallen was occupying him, the weight of ignorance that had been so heavy, in place of which now was something heavier still. He could not quite shoulder it. Sayce, who was weaker, it had felled.

"But, she did!" on the floor, groveling there, the old man cried.

Truth is an objective phenomenon. It

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acts in us and on us like a chemical precipitate. Sayce had given it no thought, and before him it stood revealed. The revelation, which ordinarily would have got at him hours before, but which his great love interfering had delayed, was crushing him now with its blinding force. The attitude of Uxhill, his strange quiescence at the infamous charge, some gleam of the real which he, in seeing, made Sayce intercept, these things encountering in memory incidents, some overlooked, others dismissed; words uttered by Nora accusing not Uxhill but the girl, words that he had indignantly hushed,—these things combining and from the chemistry of the mind there emerged the truth.

“She did,” he repeated, crouching in the sudden light. “Only one conversant with the minute phenomena of disease could have done it. Only one con-

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versant with medicine could have so graduated the doses that only the symptoms of anæmia appeared. She knew. You didn't."

From the floor he crawled to a chair, raised himself on it and sat nodding at the illusion that had unmasked. The illusion had been to him dearer than life. He had lost it.

"Yes, she knew. She forgot that I loved her, remembering that you are rich."

Then, at the truth, he shuddered.

Before Uxhill, too, an illusion had unmasked, dropped its domino, stepped from its disguise, stripped itself bare. In one of the fancy balls which the imagination provides for days he had been roaming. But, the high walls of the revel had crumbled. From the ruins a leprous horror oozed. In the fetid air swung the Why, vomiting its rhymes and reasons,

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suffocating him with hideous retrospects, through which zigzagged the heightening horror that that sweet life of Maud's had seemed to her menaced,—and by him !

From that he shrank, and, shrinking, turned, picked up his hat, hurried to the hall, to the snow, to the waiting cab.

In the hall the servant who had told him Sayce was not in stood, her back to the wall. Opening the brown door, he swung it after him, but, through it, just as it was closing, a sound flew, reperculated.

Irresolutely, his hand on the knob, he listened.

Before him on the box, in a coat of snow, the cabman sat.

“Did you hear that?” Uxhill asked.

“It was a gun, I guess.”

Uxhill threw back the door, passed in again to the room beyond, where, at the threshold, the servant, white as the snow

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in the street, hovered, without courage to enter.

Within, beneath the big chandelier, Sayce lay, huddled in a heap, his face covered with blood, the pistol beside him.

Uxhill hurried forward, knelt to his old friend, spoke to him, touched him. Rising and uncovering his head, he turned to the scared white maid.

“Ring for the police. I wish I could wait. But I cannot.”

Again through the hall he went, got to the street, told the cabman to drive to the Buckingham, telling him to drive quickly.

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## X.

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DEATH may be the last to occur, but it may also be the least. Many are the things that are worse. The abrupt exit of Sayce, vacating existence in the crash of faith demolished, had stirred Uxhill, though less than the emotions preceding. He was too violently affected already to regard it other than as an inferior horror, attributable, as was all else that had occurred, to one who, an illusion unmasking, from a saint had changed into a saurian.

In every affection there is the germ of hate. Hatred is but love reversed. In Uxhill's heart a hole had been dug and, the contents displaced, such was the revulsion that, about the neck of the girl where he had thought to put his arms,



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could he have got his fingers and pressed them there till her reptile ghost emerged, he would have died of delight.

Where she was, no one, perhaps, but Sayce could have told. But, wherever she was, the noise of the suicide would follow and alone to her tell the reason. No doubt it was by way of precaution against a possible charge, which the divorce proceedings might provoke, that already she had taken herself to some spot, from which, once the proceedings effectual and the divorce decreed, she could descend in vampirish beauty, capture him with her Madonna air that was lethal as the Borgias, coerce him with her small, thin hand that was steady as the Brinvilliers, and yield to him her cool, chaste lips that were malignant as virus.

At the memory of the spell, impermanent yet real, which those lips had

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exerted, the surer knowledge of their nameless shames recurred, and it was with a horror of them, horror of her, horror of himself, superposing on the still deeper horror which another had undergone, that Uxhill got from the cab and entered the hotel.

At the office he did not stop ; he knew the way, he needed no herald, and up in the lift that had taken him that afternoon he soared, alighting in the hall where Nora had cowered, and down it he went to the room where Mowgy was sleeping. Adjoining it was another where he knew that Maud must be.

A moment he waited. Like Mowgy, perhaps, she, too, was sleeping, and if aroused, might come to the door, see him, think he had returned to finish his work, and, shudderingly, slam and bar it.

Even so he must bear it. At last he had got at the Why, and to that, surely,

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if through the door itself, she would listen.

A moment he waited. Then, tentatively, he knocked. The door opened. Before him was Maud, her head lifted suddenly in that attitude a deer has when surprised, yet without alarm, with none of the dread he had feared, with wonder merely. Then at once she seemed to understand. One hand of hers was concealed by the door. The other that hung at her side moved up a little and back, the contraction of it reiterating the surprise which her face expressed.

“Maud!”

It was all he found, but in it he put his heart, his soul, the agony of his great despair. Again he uttered it, but this time he was in the room, the door closing behind him.

“Maud! Only for the old days’ sake, only for them, give me a moment now.”

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He was eating her with his eyes, and into the famine of them she peered. But there was no fear in her own, a query merely, a perplexity and a doubt.

“All the afternoon I had expected you, and when you came to Mowgy, but not to me—”

“Don’t speak to me, don’t answer me, only look at me while I tell you that if I had a thousand lives I would give each one for you.”

But, she was looking at him, her lips half parted, the glories of her eyes aglow. He had no need to ask her that.

“Each one,” he repeated. “Was there nothing to say it to you? Nothing to say I could not harm you?”

The doubt now must have been going, the perplexity and query, too, for to those half-parted lips a sad little smile had come. She looked away and then at him, and then away, far away, once more.

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“Harm that comes to a woman from the man she loves, if she love him enough, she can endure. But had you wished to harm, would you have gone to find me? Would you have been ill because you could not? I have been very wrong. I believed that you and that woman were trying to, and without reproach I would have let you, but I could not leave Mowgy to be killed by her, too. Not that you would have permitted that, but she would have died, as I might have.”

“I know it,” he answered. “But, if I had known it too late, if you had died, died thinking me in league with that reptile, the torments of the lowest depths of Dante’s seventh hell would have been myrrh and cassia by comparison to what I should have suffered. Yet, how you could have thought me capable of conceiving such a thing—”

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"You conceived no such thing," she interrupted. "Yet, why I thought you had you can explain to yourself better than I."

"Yes. I will tell you. It is my confession—"

Again she interrupted him. "One that I will not hear. That you had an interest in that woman I knew. I know, too, it has gone. You would not be here had it not. But what it was I forbid you to tell. It has gone; let it go. Don't speak of it. Let it be a thing forgot. I won't have it between us."

The room was comfortless and chill. Unconsciously it oppressed. Uxhill moved nearer to his wife. He was so close to her now that he caught the odor of her hair. It had in it the scent of flowers that are far away.

"Nor I. I will have nothing between

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us. Nothing. But that reptile must be fanged."

"Gerald! Who is there to do it but you and I? It would be public, and what a legacy for that child!"

"If you had only told Sayce."

With the same sad smile she answered, "I could tell no one anything that reflected on you."

His hat he still held; he put it down, and took her hand in his.

"Meanwhile I have waded from horror to horror, but horror's crown of horror is that you could have thought me capable of this thing."

"Gerald, forgive me."

"No, Maud, forgive me."

"Then let us both forgive." For a moment she hesitated. Slowly with that motion the swan has she turned her head aside. "Are you still planning to go to Rhode Island?"

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“I promised Mowgy to take her home to-morrow.”

Quickly she looked up. “And you propose to?”

“I promised. But, she stipulated that you should go, too. Will you? Tell me.”

Her eyes were in his. From his hand her own went up about him. The other joined the first. They made a necklace there.

“I will tell you that the very weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea.”



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## XI.

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A GERMAN, whom only Frenchmen read, said that happiness is illusory. But, is not horror more so? Pain, it may be, is necessary for the equilibrium of things. It may be, also, that evil is good which we do not understand. Both, perhaps, are needful. But, not horror. Otherwise it could not be so evanescent. The horror that had fastened on the Uxhills dissipated itself as horror always does, for even when it lingers you get accustomed to it and it ceases to be that.

Since the crowning horror at which Uxhill had protested, a year and a day had gone. It was the pre-Lenten season, which in Vanity Square is the most turbulent of all, a succession of regal dinners and royal balls, for which,

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from overseas, occasionally, come people of mark.

Among others were the Gemine, Ux-hill's sister and brother-in-law, who, obligingly, stopped at his house.

Mme. Gemine, Sally as she was generally known, had not been in the States since her marriage, and latterly she had been urgent to display their exuberance to her prince, who, however, cared very little for exuberant things. He was good-looking, as many Romans are ; he spoke English without accent as many Romans do, and he approached everything with a polite remoteness of demeanor which was due, not to hauteur, but timidity, to the fear of the fright of being bored.

A beautiful day, a beautiful book, the rustle of leaves, the ripple of waters, and no pauper could have been more content than this prince, descended from a Nero-

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nian consul. For his sins, the sins of some anterior life, perhaps, Sally was essentially worldly. She counted that day lost on which she had not spent a great deal of money, seen a great many people, and done a great many things, with perspectives of more extravagance and activity on the morrow. It was her cross that Gemine had no small talk, as it was his that she had no manners,—common crosses that made them an admirably assorted couple.

In Vanity Square they had now been a full fortnight, during which, had such gargantuanism been possible, each night they could have eaten a dozen dinners, each night they could have sat in as many boxes, attended as many affairs. But the end of the season was approaching. On the morrow they were off again, this time to the Riviera.

Now, as the curtain rises on the

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epilogue of the drama, they were shortly going on to the opera, pending which, at dinner, they were seated between Uxhill and Maud.

The room was unchanged, the table was the same, even the servants had not altered. Only, as is usual with people who have been in hell, Uxhill and Maud were a bit sobered.

"You two stick-in-the-muds," Sally was disdainfully remarking. "You do not know how bourgeoisie you are. Is it not so, Mario?"

Mario, Prince Gemine, duke of Valtravaglia, marquis of Correse, lord of San Soria, patrician of Sienna and of Rome, was eating a white strawberry. He nodded absently. He agreed with whatever Sally said, with what anybody said. It saved time, labor, and breath. A tempestuous wife is very chastening.

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“You will forget how to talk soon,” Sally continued.

She was in white velvet. On her head was a tiara. About her jewels gleamed. She dazzled.

“You see,” said Maud, in her low, sweet voice, “Gerald does not care to travel.”

The statement was exact. Uxhill had journeyed enough,—to lands he did not wish to revisit.

Maud was in silk the color of pumpkin. So far from being bourgeoisie, as always, she was charming.

“Fiddlesticks ! he does not know what he wants ; you either. It is positively indecent.”

But at that Uxhill protested.

“Here, Sally, stop calling names.”

“Shut up !” was the lady’s prompt reply. She was smoking.

“Shut up !” she repeated. “Maud,

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you are boss in these diggings. Tell your people to pack and come with us to-morrow. In Monte Carlo you and Gerald will have something for your money. In April we can go up to the Rue de la Paix, from there over the Channel, and in June I will ship you back."

"Why in June?" Uxhill asked. "If we are there then, you might let us stay."

"Oh! as for that, stay as long as you like. But, in June, Mario and I go to the Finsburys."

"Are they nice?" Maud, who had never heard of the Finsburys before, inquired.

"She is a dear. You would love her. Gerald would, too. But not in the same way. I know him. I know him of old. Besides, I have observed her effect on Mario. Haven't I, Mario?"

"Lady Finsbury," said the last of the

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Gemine, "is the most beautiful woman I ever saw. But, her conversation,—” the prince made an almost imperceptible gesture,—“no, her conversation is less exalting.”

“Englishwomen generally are rather heavy on hand,” Uxhill, with an air of providing information, remarked.

“But she is not English,” Sally resumed. “Finsbury’s first wife was a colonial dwarf or a giant, I forget which, but something impossible. Finsbury, I know, had one child by her and a great deal to put up with. He told me all about it, and made me promise not to tell. He behaved, too, like such a gentleman. He wore crêpe on his hat for her for three whole months.”

“That was very gentlemanly,” said Uxhill. “But who consoled him?”

“The most beautiful woman that Mario ever saw. I don’t think her as extra-

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ordinary as all that. But, she certainly is a dear. Finsbury's wife adored her. She was a friend of hers, and when she fell ill she nursed her devotedly. They were compatriots. The dwarf or giant Marchioness of Finsbury was a Canadian. So is this one. This one is the daughter of a brewer."

Sally looked at her prince. "Her father was a brewer, was he not, Mario?"

"A bacteriologist."

"Well, something of the kind. They made him a peer I know. Baron Sixmith, that was it. Gerald! Do be careful! A little more and that glass would have gone all over my dress, and I have no time to change it. By the way, what time is it?"

Sally, as she spoke, turned to Patmore.

"Is the carriage here?"

"Yes, your highness," replied the butler to whom "excellency" was, per-



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haps, un-English, and, therefore, incorrect.

“Now, Patmore, don’t be highnessing me. In this free-and-easy place Madam is enough. Maud,” she continued, “Mario and I must run. You won’t mind, will you?” she added, getting from her chair as she spoke. “Why, what on earth is the matter with you? You are as pale as a ghost.”

“Damnation, Patmore!” exclaimed Uxhill, rising nervously, upsetting a chair as he did so. “You keep this room hotter than Tophet. Open a window.”

Maud looked up at Sally and attempted to smile. She did not succeed very well, however. Her under lip was trembling. But, she managed to speak.

“For a moment I was a bit dizzy. I am quite right now.”

With manifest concern, Sally contem-

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plated her. "I thought you were going to faint. If you like, I won't go."

With the same little, tremulous look, Maud shook her head.

In the protest of it, Uxhill joined.

"No, Sally, it is only the heat; it affected me. Come, little girl," he added to Maud, "let's see them off."

As Sally and her prince passed into the drawing-room, he whispered, "Bear up."

But, presently, when on to the opera the others had gone, putting an arm about her, he led her to that sofa from which, long before, she had kissed her hand at him, and then, sauntering down the room, had played the slow, sweet air that told of lovers who are ceasing to love.

"Try and forget it."

"But, Gerald, how can I? Besides, you were right. We should have done

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something. Now she has killed that man's wife, and it is our fault."

"No, dear, it is you who were right. Our first concern was Mowgy. By comparison with her, what is the loss of a woman of whose existence we have learned only through hearing that she is dead? Even otherwise justice is not ours. True justice is pity. It was in that spirit we let her go."

"And Sayce, too, Gerald. Poor Sayce!"

"There, again, you see. We could not have prevented that either. That reptile was his ideal. He shot himself not because he had lost her, but because she happened to be different from what he thought. The ideal is a picture which we paint with our heart's blood, and we are not apt to feel pleasantly toward anyone who destroys it. Another man might have shot her,—he shot him-

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self. Suicide is merely assassination driven in."

"It does all seem too terrible, though."

"The more reason why you should forget it. Sensible people think only of agreeable things, and disagreeable things they never mention."

"I fear I am not sensible, then."

"I know I did not use to be. Do you remember the night I told you to add up zeros?"

"I remember I could not."

"Nor I. I did not know their meaning. I have learned since. They mean eternity,—the eternity which I once thought had begun between us, and which I know now can never commence. Yes, zeros represent eternity, but they represent chaos as well. I have learned that, too. But, Maud, I have learned something further."

He paused and looked at her. In the pause she looked at him.

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"Yes?" she murmured.

"I have learned that out of chaos issue stars, and, out of anguish, men."

Hours later, when Sally and her prince returned, they were still seated on that sofa.

"I have no idea, you know," Mme. Gemine, entering and perceiving them there, exclaimed, "how you two tiresome people can be so tiresome as to do nothing but—"

"But," the prince approaching with his polite remoteness of demeanor, continued for her, "to do nothing is less fatiguing than doing something, at least," he added with an almost imperceptible gesture, "in society as conducted here."

Uxhill, rising, helped his sister with a wonderful cloak of purple and gold which she wore, nodding, as he did so, very appreciatively at Gemine.

"Because people are not up to some

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devilishness, it does not follow at all that they need be alarmingly dull. Only, in this part of the planet, it will be a few hundred years before that fact is generally diffused. I know it took a miracle to get it through my head."

Sally, who had seated herself, was lighting a cigarette.

"Now, Gerald, that does sound interesting. Tell us all about it, and how it occurred."

But, to this day, neither Sally nor anybody else, for that matter, save Uxhill and Maud, have ever known the true story of the miracle in Vanity Square.

THE END









